

THE LONDON READER

of Literature, Science, Art, and General Information.

[ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.]

No. 1641.—VOL. LXIII.]

FOR THE WEEK ENDING OCTOBER 13, 1894.

[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



LIFTING MARGOT IN HIS ARMS AS THOUGH SHE WERE A CHILD, EDWARD PLACED HER BESIDE HER FATHER.

MARGOT'S NATURAL ENEMY.

[A NOVELETTE.]

CHAPTER I.

"I AM quite certain I shall hate him," said Margot St. Patrick, with conviction; "I think I could have borne it better if he had been an aristocrat, but that a merchant, the son of a merchant, should ever call Castle Patrick his, is sacrilege and sin. He is sure to be vulgar and illiterate; we cannot possibly know him."

Her sister Decima, her senior by six years, looked up with a smile.

"Perhaps he will not care to know us, Margot; we shall be almost as beggars at his gates. And because Mr. Ripon's money has been made through trade it does not follow that he must be vulgar."

"There you go," cried Margot, pacing restlessly to and fro, "taking up cudgels in this man's defence. I consider him our natural enemy."

"Just because he has purchased what we offered for sale, isn't that rather illogical? Margot

dear, no one felt the parting from our old home more than I did; but we had not sufficient means to keep it up. It was going to ruin, and we did not know which way to look for money. Now by the sale of Castle Patrick, father need no more be harassed by pecuniary matters; he has enough and to spare, beside the comfortable conviction that after his death we shall not be left without provision. Then, after all, this house is our own, and quite large enough for our needs. I daresay occasionally Mr. Ripon will allow us to walk in his grounds."

"Allow!" broke in Margot, vehemently, "that is where the boot pinches most. No longer to be free to come and go at will; to be compelled to ask a favour of that man! Never, I could not stoop to do it. Do you suppose he will expect us to drop him a rustic curtsy—like this!" making a huge "cheese" of her dress. "You know he will consider us as wild Irish girls, we who trace our descent unblemished back to the time of St. Patrick himself; and it would probably puzzle him to say who was his grandfather."

"Margot! Margot! you are talking utter nonsense, and worrying yourself for nothing at all. Wait until Mr. Ripon arrives; I prophecy you

will be favourably impressed, and it is very unfair to jump to conclusions. Now put on your hat and have a good run, you will return all the better for it."

"You treat me like a child, but oh! Decima, if you knew how bitterly I feel this, how nearly my heart is broken——" her lip quivered, and as though afraid of utterly collapsing she rushed from the room, leaving Decima to say,—

"Poor child! poor child! it is hard for her; but in time she will learn to bear it bravely and well."

Meanwhile, Margot was hurrying through the garden towards the open ground beyond; to reach it she must climb a five-barred gate, and on this gate was seated a young man of rather handsome appearance.

"Here you are at last, Margot," he exclaimed in a tone of delight. "I have been waiting more than an hour in the hope of seeing you."

"Why did you not come up to the house, Dion?" she demanded, with a touch of bitterness in her tone. "Isn't it pretentious enough to please you?"

"Look here, little girl, you are not going to take that tone with me. Why, nobody cares a

cent whether you are Margot St. Patrick, of Castle Patrick, or Margot St. Patrick of the Dover House."

"Perhaps you had better speak only for yourself," she retorted in a mollified tone, "some of our friends have excused themselves from visiting on the plea that they feared we were not yet settled."

She was standing by the gate, her hands resting upon the topmost bar, making as fair a picture as ever gladdened a young man's heart.

Perhaps she knew this, for Margot was not wont to depreciate herself, indeed she took an honest, innocent delight in her own beauty.

Imagine to yourself a girl of eighteen, rather short than tall, of slender, supple figure, clad just now in a blue cotton frock, cut just low enough to give a glimpse of a white throat, which supported a dainty blonde head, and exquisite wild-rose face.

The black-lashed eyes were grey, well-opened and dewy as a child's. The nose was just sufficiently "tip-tilted" to give an air of piquancy to the other features, chief amongst which was the small, sensitive, spirited mouth.

To Dion Fitzgerald she was the incarnation of womanly loveliness, only he did not venture to say this, for Margot had a way of laughing at him when he grew over so little amorous, which was not flattering to his vanity.

Now with a bewildering glance at him from beneath those long curled lashes she said,—

"You know, Dion, that father and Decima have a way of treating me as a child which is positively shameful, when one remembers I am eighteen—why are you laughing?—well, if I had guessed the old place was to be sold I would never have let it come to pass."

"I don't see how you could prevent it," remarked Dion bluntly.

"Neither do I just now," frankly; "but I should have found out a way; I would have discovered how to make or earn money."

"You might have gone about the country selling matches," he remarked reflectively, "or, as you have the gift of song, and can play the harp with no mean skill, you might have donned your best clothes and ornaments, after the style of the lady of whom it is said, 'Rich and rare were the gems she wore,' and entertained the crowds at feasts and fairs, it might have proved lucrative in your case!"

"Dion! You are a mean wretch to laugh at me in such a fashion. I wonder how you would like to see a stranger ruling in your home, calling your household gods his."

"Never had any; as long as I have a comfortable chair or bed, plenty to eat, ditto to drink, and a little ready money I am more than content."

"You Goth! But Dion, have you heard anything about this *nouveau riche*; anything new I mean, I hope he is too vulgar for anyone to cultivate," she looked so vicious as she spoke that he laughed outright.

"You are doomed to disappointment then, Margot. Mr. Edward Ripon is said to be a man of culture, no mean artist, a capital amateur actor, and a poet of some merit, further he is not hopelessly vulgar as to birth. The Ripons if they are merchants, are of a good old stock, and Edward Ripon's mother was Lady Alexandra Cornhill."

"Oh!" ejaculated Margot, "of course he will presume upon that. When is he coming to Ballymorna?"

"Can't say for certain; but cartloads of furniture have been arriving for days; the place is pretty well in order, and Ripon may arrive at any moment. Margot, you must not think I do not feel deepest sympathy with you; but really your father and Decima have acted for the best, and no doubt you will find Ripon a capital neighbour. He is probably middle-aged and comfortable to get on with—oh! I say, don't do that; you must not cry really."

"I am not crying," wondrously, "I never do that; but you are so horrid and unsympathetic; you don't care a bit—and—and—I thought you would rail with me against—this beastly Englishman."

"So I will if it comforts you; but, Margot, I

am afraid it won't. I say, isn't it wisest to make the best of everything?"

She glanced archly then at him through her still wet lashes.

"Perhaps, I might even coax Mr. Ripon into marrying me, seeing he is 'middle-aged' and comfortable to get on with. I must give the matter serious thought. Good-bye, Dion," but he, leaping up from his seat, pursued her.

"Margot, you haven't any right to talk like that to me; you know very well that—"

"You are bound for Dublin, and are likely to miss your train. You best understand what penalties would be inflicted for such a breach of discipline, Lieutenant Fitzgerald—you shall not blame me for detaining you—so again good-bye, and I hope you will enjoy your journey," then she was gone like a variable will-o'-the-wisp, and he stood staring after her with a sense of utter discomfiture.

"She is a siren, a coquette," he muttered, "but even coquettes may be won; and no other man shall steal her from me. Then, too, I would not have her altered in any way, for to change would be but to spoil her."

Never was there a greater difference between two sisters than that which existed between Decima and Margot. The former was beautiful exceedingly, with black hair, a pale, flawless complexion, and eyes so deep a blue as to be sometimes mistaken for black. She was grave and gracious in manner, stately in mien, so that most of the young men around Ballymorna were shy of her, one having been heard to say "she would be a perfect woman if she did not always live upon the heights."

At twenty-four, beautiful as she was, Decima had never possessed a lover, never known love's turmoil; her father and sister had sufficed to make her world; wise, calm, affectionate, she insensibly awayed and governed them, for Mr. St. Patrick was as a child in worldly matters. Decima was dearly devoted to him, and to that little sister who was always a delight and an enigma to her.

They had fallen on evil days; it was hard to obtain the rents. Mr. St. Patrick would not press his tenants, and Decima in her large-hearted charity, would have died rather than have urged him to such a course. For generations the glory of the house had been declining together with its revenues; the blood of ancient chieftains ran in their veins, but one cannot live on one's ancestry, and so at last it became necessary to sell Castle Patrick which was fast falling into a ruinous condition; to remove to the Dover House just without the gates, and no one felt this change more keenly than Decima, although she was strong to hide it.

Unlike Margot she cherished no animosity against the purchaser; he had possession of their home, they had taken his gold; it was a fair and equitable bargain, yet her heart ached as she looked towards the distant turrets of Castle Patrick and realised she would never again enter its halls save as a guest. Then Margot came in flushed and somewhat disturbed.

"I've just seen Dion," she said, throwing aside her hat, "he is off to Dublin you know to join his regiment, and I am glad."

Decima, looking gravely at her, asked,—

"Has it never struck you that Dion Fitzgerald thinks just a little too much of you for his peace of mind?"

"I own to a dim suspicion of the truth," Margot remarked demurely, "but you ought to remember my revered monitor, that soldiers and sailors have a sweet heart in every town they enter. Now, I want real and undivided affection 'bread and scrape' is no more palatable to me now than in my schooldays. If I am worth anything Decima, I am worth a man's best love—even that you know doesn't count for much," laughed this young cynic, whose knowledge of love and its vagaries was nil. "Dion has promised to come over in the course of three or four weeks; I told him it was unnecessary, but like most men he is rather obtuse, and did not take the hint that his absence would be a boon and a blessing to us."

CHAPTER II.

MARGOT, returning from her morning's walk, met a stranger of tall and even noble appearance.

The close-cropped curly hair was brown, as was the almost military moustache; the eyes were blue, steady, unflinching, and disappointed as she was not to find him hopelessly vulgar in look and bearing, she at once jumped to the conclusion that this stranger was Mr. Edward Ripon, proprietor of Castle Patrick.

"I beg your pardon," he said, lifting his hat, "but I have lost my way in this labyrinth of paths; will you kindly direct me to the Castle?"

He saw the small, fair face suddenly whiten, the great grey eyes flash; but even as he wondered over this involuntary display of emotion, Margot recovered herself, and said,—

"Take the first turning to the right, follow the path until you come to a rustic bridge, then turn to the left and you will find your way easily enough."

Thanking her, he again raised his hat and turned in the direction she had named, whilst she made all possible haste home. Bursting into Decima's presence, she said,—

"I have seen him, the mighty Mogul, the fair Saxon, the Usurper. Decima, I must laugh, don't scold me—he—Mr. Ripon is so horribly handsome and aristocratic that I could not very well snub him, so when he asked me the way to the Castle, I sent him to Dead Man's End; I wonder what he will think of the Denny's hovel—he is their landlord now—and if Denny should happen to be drunk as he usually is, what an awful uproar there will be; for Denny hates the English with a holy hatred. What on earth are you going to do, Decima?" as the latter rose hastily.

"Repair the mischief you have made, if possible," Decima said, more severely than she was aware, "for aught you know, Denny may rush upon and mutilate Mr. Ripon; he is just one of those countrymen of ours of whom I am heartily ashamed; and Margot, I am sorry to say it, but you have grossly betrayed a stranger's trust."

"Oh! I say, Decima, that is too bad; I did it for fun, not malice aforethought, and Mr. Ripon will be safe enough; he looks quite capable of taking care of himself."

"You forget that the boys gather at Denny's to drink and talk themselves mad. No, you shall not come with me; I will go alone, because I shall allow neither my seal nor my envy to carry me away," and she went out leaving Margot to her not very pleasant thoughts. It was so rarely that the sweet serenity of Decima's temper was ruffled, she felt she had sinned grievously, and would have given a great deal to recall the past hour. With eyes not wholly free from tears, she watched Decima hurrying through the garden, and wondered vaguely how she would prosper. "If only I had remembered Denny is not always alone," she said aloud, "I would not have sent him there, although I hate him more than I can tell."

Hurrying on her way, Decima St. Patrick had turned to the left from the bridge, and presently came to a lane overgrown with grass and weeds, on either side was a muddy ditch and a high hedge; at the end was a brick and mud wall, which formed the background of a filthy hovel. There was no outlet, one must retrace one's steps to re-enter the field from which it led.

As she drew near to the hovel she heard the sounds of cursing and reviling; then high above all, one clear commanding voice, saying,—

"Stand aside and let me pass; do you think I am to be bullied into giving you alms! My men, you forget to word your petition courteously, if you need anything come to me at headquarters."

A low growl greeted these words; one man stooped for a stone, when Decima burst on the scene.

"For shame!" she cried, her pale cheeks glowing, her eyes ablaze with indignation, "Barney Bourke, put down that stone; will you disgrace your country by such coward's deeds?"

Edward Ripon was so amazed by this sudden interference on his behalf that he incautiously



turned to look at the new comer, and Barney Bourke took advantage to hurl his stone. It struck the Englishman upon the temple; he flashed like a tiger on his assailant.

"Who did that?" and the next moment had felled him to the ground with a well-directed blow.

In her heart Decima was terribly afraid of what would follow, but she asked with severity,—"What is the meaning of this outrage?"

"What rights he to live up to the Castle! Ain't it yours, Miss Decima, honey?" whined Terry Denny, "shure an' don't we hate t' usurper!"

"You have no right to talk in such a fashion. I am ashamed of you, a very nice idea you will give Mr. Ripon of your manliness. I am afraid, Denny, you will get yourself into some terrible trouble if you are not a little more careful; I suppose you were attempting to extort blackmail from this gentleman? Ah! you need not answer, your face does that—hush! I will not hear one word from you, with all the dignity of a queen. Then to her companion, "Come, I will lead you into the right path; no one will throw a stone at you, or utter an oath whilst I am near," and with no second glance at the assembled roughs, she, turning, led the way; but she had ample time to hear Edward Ripon's uncompromising speech.

"See here, you fellows, behave fairly by me and you will have no reason to complain; try any dastardly tricks on me and you will find that I am an ugly customer. You understand!" then with a few swift strides he was beside Decima.

"I am most sorry," he said courteously, "that you should have been subjected to annoyance because of me; I don't really think those fellows meant any actual harm."

"Which shows that you do not understand the Irish peasantry. It sounds unpatriotic to revile them, and, perhaps, their sins are the outcomes of ages and ages of oppression; but I have lived to be ashamed of them."

He was looking at her with interest; now he said,—"

"May I not ask the name of my friend in need, and how you came so opportunely to my aid."

"I am Decima St. Patrick," she answered, gravely; "and I heard you were in danger. I knew that unless mad with drink no one would touch a St. Patrick; and really I have done nothing."

Her sweet blue eyes met his frankly, the lovely face was instinct with feeling. Edward Ripon had met but two women since his arrival at Ballymorna, and they were exceedingly fair. He began to suspect that they were sisters, for although so unlike, each had the same smile, the same subtle charm; and now he said,—"

"I should not have been in such a quandary had I not in some way mistaken the directions of a young lady I chanced to meet. Do you know her? She is little and fair."

"Oh!" said Decima, "do not be hard upon Margot; it was because of what she said I came in search of you. She is such a mere child, and half in mischief, half in anger (for losing Castle Patrick is all but death to her) she misdirected you. She is only a child."

"Pray do not apologise, Miss St. Patrick. I am fully aware that you cannot regard me with any cordial feeling; but I hope in a little while to overcome your prejudice, and fully intend to do my best for my tenants."

"Thank you; but I am afraid you will get disheartened. Of course there are good as well as bad amongst them. Margot says the good predominate; but it is not so. Oh, so many times I have to blush for my countrymen—I, who love them so well. For in their blind fury they murder old men at night, mutilate cattle, hamstring horses, and boycott the innocent, and always they fall an easy prey to those who preach anarchy. They are not all bad at heart," she ceased suddenly, and Edward Ripon saw her wonderful eyes were full of tears. He scarcely knew what to say to her, and before he could frame any words she went on in a different tone.

"But your temple is bleeding; let me dress the wound for you." And although he demurred at

first, it was pleasant to be an object of care to such a beautiful young woman, so that he yielded not unwillingly.

Wetting her handkerchief in the stream she proceeded quite in a matter-of-fact way to bathe the wound, which was not a slight one, and having done all she could to make Edward more comfortable, suggested they should be getting on their journey.

At a bend in the road she paused, saying,—"From here you can see the turrets of Castle Patrick, and if you follow the long line of chestnuts you cannot possibly lose your way."

"May I not walk with you to The Dower House. You would be showing me charity to invite me there. I am more lonely than you would think. Then, too, I want to get acquainted with my nearest neighbours without delay."

"Come," she said, graciously, "father will give you a hearty welcome; but I am afraid you will have a great deal of trouble in teaching Margot to regard you in a friendly spirit; still you can try."

Thus it happened that a little later Edward found himself in a dainty room where Margot sat sewing.

The *mignon* face flushed crimson, as Decima performed the ceremony of introduction. She was angry that she had placed herself in an awkward position, doubly angry that this man this hated usurper should venture beneath their roof.

But she was frank and kindly too, so that having acknowledged his presence by an infinitesimal bow, and a few chilly words, she added quickly,—"

"I beg your pardon for sending you on a wild goose chase; but I never thought of danger to you."

"I am quite sure of that Miss Margot; please say no more," Edward answered kindly; and then he tried to draw her into conversation; but she repulsed his every effort with a quiet persistence wholly new to her.

Retiring to her own corner she resumed her work, although her hands trembled and a spot of angry red still burned on either cheek. No sooner had the visitor gone than she flashed upon Decima with the words,—"

"How could you, oh! how could you do it! You might have been content to bow and pass by like the Levites; but to bring him here—to let him see the nakedness of the land, then to go away and laugh over it. Decima, have you no pride, no right feeling?"

"If you displayed the latter when you sent Mr. Ripon into danger, Margot, then I must frankly acknowledge I am a stranger to it," said Decima, gravely, "it is for a Denny or a Bourke to stoop to treachery, not a St. Patrick," and she walked away, leaving Margot in a state of increased discomfort.

As the days went by Edward became a frequent visitor at The Dower House. Mr. St. Patrick was quickly won by his frank bearing, his unaffected friendship. Decima gave him always a gracious welcome; but with Margot he made no progress.

She resolutely refused to wear the flowers he sent, or touch the delicate fruits which came daily from Castle Patrick.

He placed his horses and carriages at their service; but whilst Mr. St. Patrick and Decima felt grateful to him, Margot utterly refused to use either the one or the other, saying with a slight uplifting of her blonde head,—"

"I, at least, do not intend to figure as a pauper or pensioner as yet. Edward Ripon shall never have it in his power to twit me with benefits received."

It seemed to Decima that an alien spirit had entered her sister's body, so changed was she by their reverses and the loss of the dear old home.

CHAPTER III.

MARGOT was very wretched in these days although she would never have confessed so much even to Decima. It seemed to the poor child that no one cared for her, that she lived a life

apart from the others, and strive as she would it was not always easy to steel herself against the frank good nature, the persistent kindness of Edward Ripon. He was grieved for this wilful girl, would have done much to make her happy, if only she would have permitted him, but she held aloof resolutely, so that he determined she should "gang her ain gait" and in time learn wisdom.

It was on a sultry July day that he, walking by the lake, which was within a half mile of The Dower House, came upon Margot roundly scolding a boatman for objecting to row her across.

"Shure, Miss Margot honey," he urged, "tis not Mike Murphy thot's afeard, but div yer not know there's danger ahead? Lift yer purty eyes to the sky, it's a storm we'll be gittin'; an' if harm befell yez, wot's the loikes o' me to say to Miss Decima an' t' squire? It can't make no differ to yez, if yez goes the day or the morrow!"

"I shall go now, if I have to row myself, and you're a coward, Mike."

It was at that moment she became aware of Edward's presence. The colour rushed into her cheeks, her eyes flashed, she was ashamed that he should have overheard her, but that made her only the more resolved to put out.

"Yes, or no, Mike; I am waiting!" she said. Then Edward spoke.

"Pardon me, Miss Margot, but Mike is right; a storm is blowing up, and you, who so well know the character of these lakes, should not urge him on to danger, perhaps death; remember he has a wife and family dependent upon him."

"Mr. Ripon, you ought to know advice given gratuitously is rarely acceptable, and I fail to see by what right you constitute yourself my mentor."

She hated herself for giving utterance to those words, but she was smarting under a sense of defeat, and the contemptuous glance Edward bestowed upon her did not make her more amenable to reason.

"I spoke because I thought you scarcely realised the peril you invited Murphy to share," said Edward, coldly. "I considered you more thoughtless than heartless; I beg your pardon for the mistake I made."

That settled the matter at once; with her cheeks aflame she sprang into the boat, saying,—"

"You exaggerate the danger; I, at least, am not a coward!"

To her surprise Edward stepped in after her.

"I will go with Miss Margot; at least I have neither wife nor children to leave destitute. Please oblige me by calling at The Dower House and acquainting Mr. St. Patrick with our excursion, and say I will take all possible care of the young lady under the circumstances."

"Arrah, Mither Ripon, it's yerself knows but little of the lakes, div ye understand how moighty decaitful they are?"

"I know enough to serve my turn," quietly, and he bent to the oars.

Margot sat with her head drooped, ashamed of her wilfulness and folly, but too proud to acknowledge herself in the wrong to this very masterful man whom she considered her natural enemy; but she said, in a very meek voice,—"

"Do not come if you have any fear."

"What a woman dares, I may surely do. Are you ready?"

They rowed for some time in silence, then the inborn gaiety of her nature asserted itself; with an arch look and coquettish smile, she said,—"

"Did you think I was a child to be frightened by the bogies you and Murphy were raising?"

"No; I believed you were too much a woman to engage in any such foolhardy enterprises!" Edward answered without a glance at her.

She was a wee bit nettled by his manner, and retorted,—"

"You are very rude. Are all your countrymen equally bearish? Now, there isn't a man of our set who would not profess himself delighted to accompany one of us on a boating trip."

"Professions are very well," curtly, "but I cannot congratulate you on the wisdom of your friends and acquaintances."

She stole another look at him; he was decidedly handsome, and as decidedly cross. She felt afraid to address him again, and the next quarter of an

hour passed uncomfortably enough for Margot; the lesson was a salutary but not a pleasant one.

And now they were a long distance from home, the clouds suddenly gathered together, black and ominous; the waters were growing turbulent, the wind was rising to a perfect gale, and the first heavy drops of rain began to fall.

"Oh!" cried Margot, pocketing her pride, "it is coming, we must get home quickly if we would escape the storm."

"We are in the thick of it," answered Edward, grimly. He wanted all his strength now for the struggle before him, and would not waste it in speech.

Now the storm broke in all its fury, in vain did he struggle to turn the boat round; the wind and current were too strong for him. Then he looked at his pretty companion, she was very white but quite composed, as she said,—

"There is no help for it, Mr. Ripon, we must go with the tide."

"Do you know that you are in great peril?" he shouted, for it was now almost impossible to hear each other speak. She nodded. A moment later she said,—

"Let her go; we are near Luff Island. It is uninhabited, but we shall be safe there until the storm has passed."

Following the direction of her glance, he saw through the heavy rain a small desolate-looking spot rising from out the angry waters, and steered his course towards it. But it was only by a miracle they reached it, the little boat being tossed hither and thither like a dead body.

With the utmost difficulty he assisted his companion to land, for the shore was rocky, then he turned to moor the craft, to his horror the violence of the current was so great that the rope was literally torn from his hands, the boat whirled to a distance, and there were these two young people stranded on the inhospitable isle.

All Edward's resentment vanished then; he was so grieved at the plight of the girl beside him, and he quite expected that she would begin to sob and wring her hands; but instead she said, almost firmly,—

"I—I am very sorry this has happened; it was all my fault; can you forgive me?"

So pretty she was in her remorse, so artless and childlike was her expression that he answered heartily,—

"Oh, don't trouble about me, Miss Margot; I shall do very well, I am only vexed to think that you may take harm from exposure to this storm."

"It would serve me right if I did," she said, under her breath; then aloud, "Give me your hand, if you please; I can take you to a place a little further up where we shall at least find shelter—but the wind is so strong I cannot get along without help."

He possessed himself of the little hand extended, and together they fought their way to a spot where a jutting rock not only afforded a dry resting-place, but screened them effectually from the gale.

Here they sat down side by side, Margot very humble as became such a little sinner. Presently, she took courage to say,—

"I was wrong, you were right; I am glad now poor Murphy did not come out with me. His wife would have been frantic."

"I am afraid that your father and sister will be in the same state," he replied gravely, "if the boat is cast up on the opposite shore they will conclude the worst has happened."

She rose in greatest distress and agitation.

"Oh, what a wretch I have been; Mr. Ripon, be generous to me, and help me to signal them in some way, that all is well. When the rain ceases they can see quite across to this point, and some one is sure to rescue us when the gale is over."

"What are we to do?" he asked, rather helplessly.

"Could not you break off a bough of that tree yonder, and drive it into the ground, just beyond the brow of the rock; we will fasten my sash to it, luckily it is a bright one," and before he could

stay her, she had mounted to the summit, and was hurrying with him to the nearest tree.

With much labour they erected their signal, and returned to their shelter, but Edward was concerned to find Margot's clothes were drenched and clung limply about her.

"I wish I could build a fire for you," he said, pitifully, "but there is absolutely no fuel lying about; even if there were my vestas are completely ruined."

"Oh, don't pity me," cried Margot, "I deserve nothing but your anger; how very badly you must think of me."

"Not so badly as I did; and I believe," a smile curving his mouth, "that you will not transgress in like fashion again. Why were you so wilful?"

"I did not want to be thwarted; and I would not show the white feather, even when I knew your warning was a true one. I am not like Decima; she is all goodness; whilst I am the reverse."

"I should be sorry to think you all bad," Edward said, with mock gravity, "you surely have some redeeming feature in your character. Miss Margot, if the storm rages all night, what shall we do?"

"We can only remain here till the morning and fair weather come."

They sat in silence awhile, then a plaintive voice murmured,—

"I am so hungry; I missed my lunch, and it seems likely I shall lose my dinner!" for all its plaintiveness the voice had a decided touch of fun in it.

He regarded her with some surprise, then as her gray eyes met his, his own reflected their amusement and together they laughed.

"We are in a really serious plight, I don't suppose anything eatable is to be found on this out-of-the-world spot."

"I shall turn cannibal before morning," she protested, "already I begin to feel an unholiness craving for food. Of course, I am rightly punished, but it is rough on you, who have been playing Good Samaritan all through."

"I did not miss my lunch; look out a moment, Miss Margot, I think the worst of the gale is over."

"Yes, but it will be hours before any boat can put out."

Once more they relapsed into silence, Margot shivering further under shelter; Edward hastily drew off his coat, wrapping it about her, despite all her vehement protests; and then as she lifted her eyes to thank him, he saw they were filled with tears she would not let fall.

"You are very good to me," she said uncertainly, "I am ashamed."

The slow hours crept by; the rain had ceased almost as suddenly as it began, the lake though rough was no longer really dangerous; but Edward knew by experience how sudden were the changes and feared that they must remain on the island all night.

It was by no means a pleasant reflection; their adventure would make a great deal of gossip, and then, too, he was honestly alarmed for Margot's health.

As he brooded over these things her head fell forward upon his shoulder; at first he thought she had fainted; but the gently-drawn breath told him she was sleeping, and he put an arm about her to support her.

How little and slender she was, how like an innocent child she looked with her blonde hair all loose about her fair face and throat.

"Poor little girl! poor little girl!" he murmured, and would not so much as change his position lest he should rouse her.

He was cramped and numbed, exhausted too with his exertions, but even to himself he did not complain, his heart being filled with tender pity for his companion.

It was quite dark now, but suddenly in the distance he saw a small light which seemed to waver over the waters; watching with bated breath, he saw it coming nearer, then gently shaking the girl, he said,—

"Miss Margot! Margot! help is at hand!" and shouted long and loud.

CHAPTER IV.

He was answered by voices sounding distant and indistinct, but coming from the direction of the shore; and in his relief forgot all etiquette.

"Margot, dear child, our trials are over," he said, cheerfully.

She roused herself then, blushing furiously, as she disengaged herself from the kind arm.

"Oh, thank Heaven!" she cried, "I am more glad than I can tell. Call again, Mr. Ripon."

He obeying waited for a reply, it came much clearer this time, even the words reaching him.

"Is it you, Ripon? Is Margot safe?"

"Yes, pull to the left side of the rock," then he took the girl's cold hands in his, holding them by way of encouragement and support; she was trembling so that she could scarcely stand. "You have been a brave little soul, don't break down now," he said, kindly, "for your father's sake and the boatmen's—they will have their work cut out to carry over two passengers, for I don't think I could pull a stroke to save my soul."

"I—I—shall not cry or faint—only you must not speak too kindly to me; I am only a wee bit unnerved—but, I cannot bear your goodness."

Nearer, nearer came the light; the splash of the oars made weird music on the night air, as the shadowy boat and oarsmen approached the shore. The next instant the grating sound upon the sand announced its safe arrival, and lifting Margot in his arms as though she were a child, Edward placed her beside her father, whose haggard face and anxious eyes testified to the terror he had sustained.

He gripped the younger man's hand fast.

"I owe you a life," was all he said, but it spoke volumes. Edward laughed, having all an Englishman's horror of a scene.

"Oh, not such a big debt as that. Ah! Murphy, your honest face is a sight for sore eyes," and exhausted he sank into the boat.

Not a word did Margot utter; she half-reclined on her father's breast, with fast closed lids, and cheeks as white as snow. All through the journey she never moved, and it was her father who on reaching the opposite shore carried her home, Edward wearily following, because that night he was to spend at the Dover House.

Decima scarcely less white than her sister, met them in the hall; her beautiful eyes showed signs of tears, and as for a moment Margot stood dazed by the sudden change from darkness to light, she ran forward, crying,—

"Oh, my dear! my colleen!" and Margot, with a little hysterical sob, flung herself upon her breast, panting out,—

"Thank him, Decima, I never can," and straightway swooned.

She was at once conveyed to her own room where despite the season a fire was burning, and after restoring her to consciousness, all precautions were taken to prevent harm following her exposure—for had not her mother died of that cruellest and most insidious disease—consumption, and was not Margot like her, but a delicate slip of a creature?

Strangely enough, however, the girl took no harm, beyond a slight cold, she was not one whit the worse for her adventure; but Edward was so stiff, gave such apparent signs of illness, that neither Mr. St. Patrick nor Decima would allow him to return home. The former said,—

"Let the girls nurse you well; it is the least they can do to prove their gratitude," and it must be confessed the invalid did not strenuously oppose him. It was pleasant for so lone a man to find himself the object of so much care and womanly kindness; it was very pleasant to lie with half-closed eyes listening to Decima reading some enchanting story, or moving with such quiet grace about the sunny room, pleasanter than all things else, to watch the smiles come and go on Margot's tell-tale face, to meet her shy regard, to hear her broken thanks.

"I shall never forgive myself; I am ashamed to remember how I hated and abused you. Now I owe you my life, and am so stupid as to find no adequate words of gratitude," that was what she had said to him the day following their strange experience, and he had answered,—

"If you think you owe me any debt, pay it with your friendship, Miss Margot," and with her prettiest smile, her daintiest blush, she had ratified the compact by giving him her hand.

Despite this, however, they quarrelled often, for Margot was as wayward and capricious as a child, and often resented Edward's very plain criticisms on her conduct. She seemed to take a positive delight in appearing her very worst before him, probably because, although she would not confess it to herself, she was quickly learning eagerly to anticipate his coming, to feel the day long when he did not appear at The Dower House—he had now returned to Castle Patrick, being quite restored to his normal condition—but he visited his friends so frequently that the villagers began to question each other which sister he intended to marry. Some voted in favour of Decima, but most of them said,—

"Oh, shure its Miss Margot, it's she has the bonnie ways," for with all she was dearly loved, whilst a few feared Decima with her sweet, grave ways, and stately mien.

Now Margot openly ridiculed Edward, poked fun at his schemes for the uplifting of his tenants, professed to be the ignorant, fanatic priest's ally, played the part of wet blanket to perfection, and yet, despite all her faults and her perversity, Edward was drawn irresistibly to her, but neither she nor Decima guessed it.

One evening he dined with them and Margot was in her sweetest mood; she sang him the songs he loved best, listening attentively to all that he said, wondering a little fearfully why her heart should beat so madly, and what was the nameless power this man exercised over her. She even at his invitation went out into the pleasant garden; the moon was at its full and the long level beams of light fell athwart her exquisite face, made an aureole of the blond hair; from under black lashes the grey eyes looked out dreamily, there was even a touch of sadness in them which but increased their charm.

"Miss Margot," said the young man bending over her. "You have given me a very happy evening; why should it not be the forerunner of many others? Why need we always be at variance?"

"I don't know," simply, "perhaps it is because I am a spoiled child; all my life father and Decima have conspired to make me what I am, and I suppose I do not like contradiction. But," with a bewitching glance, "I am not quite so bad as I was!"

"You improve on acquaintance," he answered, smiling down at the half wistful face; "and with a word or a look you can undo all the mischief you have previously made. But don't you think life is all too short to waste it in idle bickerings! To-night you are kind, what will you be to-morrow!" sinking his voice to a whisper.

"What would you have?" she replied, trembling a little.

"I would have you as you are now, only that your eyes should tell more than friendship's tale, and your lips should give me sweeter words than they have ever yet done—Margot."

"Ripon, can you spare a moment," broke in a voice, and, with a sense of injury, Edward found Mr. St. Patrick close by them; but, he did not see the white figure flitting back to the house, or hear a broken sob, as Decima escaped from her seat amongst the laurels where she had been an unwilling eavesdropper. All he knew was that his host had arrived on the scene at a most inopportune moment, just when Margot was most inclined to listen to him—and Margot, where was she? with a glance at him, half tender, half afraid, she, bowing, left the men together and returned to the house. Decima was not in the drawing-room, so concluding she had gone up to her own chamber, Margot followed so lightly that no sound of her steps disturbed the silence. She reached Decima's door, which was partly open, when she both saw and heard that which chained her to the spot. Before the open window her sister was kneeling, the room having no other light than that borrowed from the moon. But Margot could clearly see the white anguish on the lovely face, the despair which darkened the beautiful eyes. Decima's hands were clasped upon her breast as though she sought to ease the intolerable

pain consuming her; and her broken voice was pleading,—

"Dear Heaven, help me to bear my cross! Help me to hide my love not only from him but little Margot, she must never know, it would break her heart to learn that we were rivals, and my life is spoiled because he finds her fairest. Oh, my heart! my heart! how shall I bear this agony of pain!"

White as a ghost stood Margot; it needed only her sister's words to reveal her own secret to her; each loved Edward, and surely, to-night, he had shown his marked preference for the younger sister. What should she do? Was she strong enough to cast him away? Would that profit much! Surely he was not a man lightly to love, and as lightly to forget! Then, thinking of all Decima's goodness to her throughout her motherless young life, she turned and fled. In her own little sanctuary she heard her sister go down again, and wondered how she could be so strong; then, stripping off her pretty finery she went cowering to bed. But she strained her ears to listen to Edward's farewell words, and departing steps; then the bitter tears came. She dared not moan or cry aloud, lest she should be overheard, and, when presently Decima entered her room, she feigned sleep; but she knew just how she looked as she softly said,—

"Heaven bless and keep you, little Margot, and give you your heart's desire."

Then she stole away, and the poor child, sitting erect, with tears streaming down her face, murmured,—

"I can bear it best; I am only a frivolous creature, I shall forget, I will forget, and he will turn to her; but, oh my love! my love! what a cruel fate is mine!" Tossing to and fro, fighting over and over again that bitter battle with self, she spent the night longing for the dawn, and when morning came she wished it night. How should she endure to meet Edward, how teach her lips to smile when her heart was breaking! How give the lie to her loving look as they parted the previous night!

She took breakfast in her own room where a letter was brought to her; she glanced disdainfully at the handwriting, frowning as she tossed it aside; then suddenly a thought struck her, she stretched out her hand for it, smiling bitterly as she said,—

"My first weapon of defence," still smiling, she read it through; then she rose and made a careful toilet. From her window she saw Edward's arrival, marked the glad expression on the handsome face, and moaned, "Good-bye, good-bye, oh, my love, my love, you will hate me before the end."

But weakness was foreign to her so she prepared to go down looking as unlike the victim of untoward fate as possible. Her cheeks were flushed, her eyes bright, and though her heart was heavy, she tripped gaily enough down the staircase to the room where Decima, pale, calm, and gracious was entertaining Edward,—

"I have news for you sis," she cried blithely, "Dion is coming home. Oh, Mr. Ripon, I was unaware that you were with Decima."

Something in her manner chilled him, so that he responded coldly, not guessing how her heart was racked; and she continued airily, "he will be with us to-morrow; he has actually obtained three days leave, are not you glad? It is always so jolly when he is with us. Mr. Ripon you must let me introduce you to Lieutenant Fitzgerald; he is our oldest friend, and his people are (with the exception of yourself) our nearest neighbours."

Decima gazed at her in silent surprise, she had never been rapturous concerning Dion before, and, whilst Edward murmured some conventional phrases she studied Margot carefully. No, the girl was evidently not playing a part; she was naturally gay; then why, oh! why had she given their visitor any encouragement? And, whilst she pondered, Margot, excusing herself on some slight pretext, escaped to the garden where Edward could see her, seated on the low wall, one hand caressing a huge retriever's head, the other holding Dion's letter, which she apparently read with pleasure.

A little later he joined her, asking in a tone of

suppressed fury, "What is there between you and Lieutenant Fitzgerald?"

CHAPTER V.

SHE lifted, laughing, defiant eyes to his. "Well just at present twenty miles by rail and two by water—Dion is now at Dublin."

"You shall not throw me off with badinage," he said, in a perfectly quiet tone, but still one of concentrated anger, "are you engaged to this fellow?"

"Well no—not engaged," with demurely drooped lids.

"But he is your lover! speak; you shall answer me and plainly."

"Do you think I am so unlovely I can boast but one!" laughing heartlessly, "well to be frank, I am inclined to believe I like—Dion—best."

A moment he stood regarding her in silence, whilst her heart throbbed and ached, and her soul sank under the reflection—

"What must he think of me?"

Then he said, in those cruel level tones which cut her as a knife.

"You have wantonly added me to the long list of suitors I presume, as the Indian brave adds scalp to scalp in token of his prowess! I must congratulate you on your skill and *finesse*—and (here he burst into passion) I wish to Heaven I had never seen you, for you are more false than you are fair. Why it was only last night you allowed me to believe that you cared for me—your eyes said it."

"I am not accountable for the freaks of your imagination, and even if I did seem to like you a little, I never dreamed you were in earnest—I gave you credit for being an excellent male flirt."

"Thank you; you could not well insult me more. May I ask do you intend to marry this fortunate young soldier?"

"How can I tell! I change my mind so often; it is a woman's privilege."

"Of which you apparently avail yourself to the utmost. Thank you for your present candour, and forgive me for an offence of which I promise to be guilty no more—you have taught me a very bitter lesson."

"Oh don't go like that; I verily believe you are angry with me," but he would not turn again to address her, rather he flung out of the garden in a passion of anger and disappointed love—if he had looked back he would have seen a pair of little white hands, go up to shield a small, wretched face as the little figure awayed in agony, falling suddenly prone along the grass, whilst a voice all weak with victory which had cost so dear moaned,—

"Oh love, my love! I have broken your faith, I have made you think evil of me—now may Heaven in its mercy turn your heart to Decima."

How long she lay there she could not tell; but when she rose she was dry-eyed, calm—only it seemed to her that the world itself was changed since she stood in the same spot with Edward only a few hours ago—a few hours! A life time, a century, as reckoned by the anguish of her soul.

As she entered the room where Decima sat, she could but notice how dim that radiant beauty appeared, what great circles were beneath the blue eyes, and she thanked Heaven that she had been strong enough to resist the pleadings of her own heart.

Decima, looking up, asked quietly,—

"Margot dear, am I to wish you happiness with Mr. Ripon?"

"Why no," answered the girl with affected surprise, "what bee have you got in your bonnet! You ought to know what a sorry coquette I am, and I even tried to subject Edward Ripon—I think (coolly) he lost his head a little last night, but he made me understand very plainly just now that he considers me a despicable sort of young woman."

"Margot! is it true?" gasped Decima, thrown off her guard. "Was I wrong in supposing he

cared for you and you returned his attachment!"

"Beyond all question yes; why I don't even like him—and—in spite of all I have said against Dion, I am glad he is returning. You see, I am a poor sort of body and could never live up to Edward Ripon's standard, and I should hate to be constantly reminded of my inferiority. If I marry at all, I think my husband will be called Dion."

And then she laughed recklessly, only Decima did not heed for she was saying over and over again to herself,—

"She does not love him; oh my heart, there is hope yet for us," and she never guessed what agonising torture this little butterfly sister was enduring all for her sake.

It troubled her when Edward failed to call throughout the three succeeding days, and being left much alone she had time to brood over this fact to her own discomfort.

She saw little of Margot, for Dion had arrived and the girl suffered him to monopolize her society, tolerated his flatteries, his ardent speeches, until he thought he had really ground for hope.

She was thoroughly reckless in these days; she would give herself no time for thought, feeling that thought would be madness; so she let herself be whirled along by the current, and often Decima wondered over her extremely high spirits, believing that little Margot had really found her heart at last, only to give it to Dion Fitzgerald for whom she entertained but slight esteem.

It chanced one day that walking alone she was suddenly confronted by Edward; the unexpectedness of the encounter startled her out of her sweet serenity.

Her face first flushed then grew ghastly pale, her blue eyes dilated, and her lips quivered; she could not move or speak.

A less vain man than Edward did not exist but he could not blind himself to her agitation, and a thought which had been vaguely present in his mind, took definite form.

He was weary of his solitary life, in all the world he had neither kith nor kin; he knew Decima to be as pure and true as she was beautiful; she would never trick him as her syren sister had done—would it not be wise to ask her to share his lot?

He could give her affection and esteem, from these love would duly grow.

Whilst these thoughts rushed through his brain with lightning swiftness, he was holding Decima's hand in his and speaking common place conventional words, thus giving her time to recover her lost composure.

And presently she spoke, though with some effort.

"How foolish you must think me, Mr. Ripon, to be so easily startled; but I was not expecting to see you, I half thought you were from home, as you have not recently visited us."

"I have had so much to do and to think about; matters are not going so smoothly as I could wish; some of the tenants are so very unreasonable. But I am not going to bother you with such things. If I have not offended beyond forgiveness by my apparent neglect, you will let me walk with you."

"Come," she answered, gently, "you should know we are not easily offended."

Her grave and gracious manner had returned to her; the past few days of anxiety and pain had given an ethereal look to her beauty; now he knew and understood all that he was to her, he was infinitely touched, the more so, because she had so unwittingly betrayed her secret.

They were in a lonely lane; he suddenly possessed himself of her hands, saying,—

"Will you not let me share a longer journey with you, Decima? I can give you reverence and affection; you never shall regret saying yes to my pleading—shall we go through life together?"

It was not an impassioned wooing, but then Decima was not exacting, and with all her pure heart she loved him. So meeting his regard frankly, she said,—

"Do you indeed mean this? Can I satisfy

and make you content? Oh, think well before you answer."

She was so humble that his heart was moved to extremest pity.

"I wish to call no other woman wife, Decima, are you going to make me happy?"

"Oh, I hope so! I hope so!" she answered under her breath. "Heaven knows that I love you dearly, but I wonder you could choose me when Margot was by."

The lips that touched hers then were cold, but she felt no chill, as satisfied of his love she lay passive awhile in his embrace, and he wondered at the glory in her eyes, thinking how mystical was her beauty, and trying to rejoice over the prize he had won.

Then quietly they returned together to her home; her heart was too full of rapture for word, the man was miserably asking himself—

"Have I done well? Have I done well? Heaven helping me, I will make her life a happy one, but what of mine?—oh! what of mine?"

He took his leave before either her father or sister returned, and she sat dreaming the sweetest dreams, lost to all else but her love and her lover's worthiness.

On his way to Castle Patrick, Edward met Margot and Dion; she was walking with her hat along upon her arm by its broad blue ribbons, and until her quick eyes recognised him, wore quite as cross a look as her companion. Now she said with a little malice-destroying laugh—

"Don't let us quarrel, Dion, on your last day. I own I was in the wrong, and am sorry; shake hands and be friends."

Thus it was that Edward saw them in a lover-like attitude, and meeting his fixed regard Margot suddenly wrenched her fingers from Dion's clasp, with a very natural assumption of confusion.

Bowing, Ripon passed them by, but his face reflected something of the rage and jealousy possessing him.

"He is a surly brute," Dion said quite audibly. "What did he mean by looking so savagely at you? Is there any truth in rumour?"

"What rumour?" yawning dreadfully, "really you must be more explicit."

"Why that he goes to The Dower House to win you for a wife!"

"Does it look like it?" scornfully, although her face flushed rosy red.

"I think so; and see here, Margot, I won't have him prowling round you."

"Indeed, Lieutenant Fitzgerald! May I ask who gave you authority over me?"

"I have a right to interfere in your behalf and my own interests; I don't intend it should be said my wife ever showed a preference for a beastly low English cad. Margot, when will you marry me and put an end to my doubts?"

"You never asked me before," she retorted, flippantly, "or I should have been prepared with an elegant reply. Much as I regret to wound your too susceptible feelings, I must say that the day will never come when I shall wear your name."

She was too angry with him for his abuse of Edward, his presumption in supposing she could be so lightly won to pay much heed to her words; they stung her companion to fiercest rage; his eyes flashed with demoniacal fire as he said,—

"It is true then what all the people say; you have set your cap at Ripon, and you would go any lengths to be mistress of Castle Patrick. Your excursion with him was deliberately planned—"

Margot stopped with a face as white as death; she was a little lady so she neither raved nor stormed, but her voice was cutting in its cold contempt as she said—

"Dion Fitzgerald, you have said enough; from to-day please remember we are not even acquaintances. The St. Patricks do not approve barrack manners; stand aside and let me pass."

"Without another word? No, no Margot, you cannot mean it! I was beside myself with jealousy; I will take back every word that I uttered—"

"Can you teach me forgetfulness of them? Can you give me back my self respect? You do not understand how dreadful a thing it is to a

St. Patrick to be lightly spoken of by those who have accepted their charity, fawned upon them in their days of prosperity—if it is true (as all people say) that I have 'set my cap' at Mr. Ripon, I wonder you should stoop to offer me your name—"

"It is idle gossip, Margot—"

"Leave me! I will not hear you, but it might be well to remember an old saying *Honi soit qui mal y pense*," and then she literally ran away from him.

Breathless and panting she reached home, to be met by Decima, her eyes dewy with joy, her lips smiling tremulously.

"Oh, Margot! Margot! I am the most happy woman on earth, and I have been so foolishly jealous, so miserably anxious; but to-day Edward has asked me to be his wife, and I—and I—" she paused, hiding her blushing face in her hands.

A shiver passed over her sister's slender figure; but the next moment she spoke out bravely as with her arms about Decima's waist she said,—

"Dear girl! dear girl! no one rejoices more in your happiness than I—and he is worthy even you."

She sat chatting with Decima a long while, betraying nothing of her anguish, but she spent the night in bitter tears; in the morning a note was brought to her from Dion; the burthen of which was—

"I was a mad fool, forgive me, I can only plead jealousy as my excuse."

To this she answered—

"If ever you had any chance with me you have ruined it wholly; Mr. Ripon is Decima's fiancé."

CHAPTER VI.

DECIMA WAS NOT an *exigante* woman; but there were times when secretly she wished her lover a little more demonstrative; whole hours they would spend together, scarcely exchanging any speech; he thoughtful even to abstraction, she attentive and eager to share his plans, his hopes, and anticipate his wishes. He rarely indulged in lover-like talk, although he treated her chivalrously; and he never kissed her save at meeting and parting.

She attributed these things partly to the many anxieties his tenants caused him, partly to his English nature; but she was far too loyal to complain to any, and found solace in the thought, "When I am his wife he will let me share not only his pleasures but his trials, and that will draw us more near to each other."

One other trouble she had, and that was the coldness existing between Margot and Edward; they never quarrelled now, seeming to avoid each other so far as was possible, and when she reasoned with her sister upon this subject she only said with a toss of her blonde head,—

"Really, Decima, because I love you am I to love your fiancé too? doesn't it seem a wee bit absurd? Every atom as silly as the proverb, 'Love me love my dog,' and you know I am not at all Catholic in my tastes; be content that I actually tolerate the man who is so soon to rob me of my guide, philosopher, and friend."

"But I am not going far from you; we shall still see each other daily."

"With a difference, however; you will belong to your husband then. Heigho! what a comical thing this marrying and giving in marriage is! I am inclined to believe I shall live and die in single blessedness."

"That is so likely, when so many covet you," Decima said with a smile both fond and proud, "only Margot, out of all your lovers I would rather you chose any but Dion Fitzgerald; he loves you honestly, I admit; but he is violent in temper, selfish in disposition, and I would have your life a happy one."

"Happy! with that secret pain gnawing always at her heart. Oh! the irony of it."

Margot laughed.

"Rest assured, I shall not figure ever as Mrs. Fitzgerald; I used to like Dion—once—but being frivolously inclined, 'to one thing constant never,' I have given him his congé."

Decima, who was neither very clever nor suspicious, felt relieved, and not guessing the anguish she compelled Margot to endure, entered into a discussion with her concerning her trousseau. The wedding was fixed for New Year's day, and there was little time to lose as it was now the middle of November.

"You must wear white satin draped with lace, and mother's pearls," said Margot bravely, "there shall not be one fleck of colour about you, for in pure white you look like a strayed angel. Edward should be very proud of you—one thing I know, that his marriage with you will materially improve his position in the eyes of his tenants."

"That is what troubles me," Decima said, resting her chin in her hollowed palm, "he will not be coerced, and these poor wretches do not understand reason. I prayed him to take no steps against Denny for pulling down his new fences and otherwise damaging his property. Now that Denny is imprisoned, his friends will be doubly embittered against Edward, and you know of what violence they are capable. Oh, my poor unhappy, distracted country."

"Now, Decima, you are not to cry; and do you think you could love or respect a man who would weakly yield to the threats of such brutes as Denny and his gang? Edward is able to take care of himself, and he has all that tenacious pluck on which his countrymen justly pride themselves. The men you speak of are mere windbags. Really, we Irish have the 'gift of the gab'; I don't know that we have much beside. Dry your eyes and have a run with me, nothing like exercise for killing the 'blues.'"

"I have some work to do for father, and the afternoon is not inviting. Then, too, Edward may return any moment from Creanadon."

"Then I must go by myself; somehow I feel suffocated in the house."

She went away then to return in a few moments dressed for walking.

"Good-bye," she said cheerfully, "wind and weather have no fear for me; I shall return ruddy and riotous," then she closed the door noisily, and a moment later Decima saw her pass through the garden out to the road, heedless alike of the biting wind and fast-gathering fog. Once well away from the house she dropped into a saunter, all the bright look fading from her face.

It was not always easy successfully to wear her mask; she wondered with a vague sense of discomfort how she could go through the trial before her; hear Edward vow to love and cherish another woman when the knowledge that he loved her remained with her. But not for an instant did she repent her sacrifice; Decima was more worthy than she to be his wife, and presently he would give her the best affection of his heart.

"When I know he is wholly lost to me," she thought, "I shall begin to forget—only it is so difficult to make the beginning."

She had now reached a very lonely spot, and hearing the rough voices of men felt a little nervous; to her right stretched the hazy fields, on her left was a steep and wooded incline. Quick as thought she parted the low growing bushes, and crept some distance into shelter, crouching down, for the times were troubled, and deeds of violence of almost daily recurrence. From her hiding-place she distinctly saw Barney Bourke and Shandy O'Rourke; through the mist their words reached her with painful clearness.

"The devil is gone to Creanadon; it's a lone road, honey; there's none to spy on us—man dear, t'what for div yez hang back?"

"It was Barney who spoke, and Shandy made answer, 'Div yez think I'm sick a' poor crater as to be afeard, Barney! It makes no difference to me if the devil dhrops alone dead at furrst shot—ain't there Denny to think on? Shure, I hates the Englisher w' a moighty hate.'"

"Well," said Barney, "moind yez kape Denny afore yez. I'll fire furrst, and if t' bullet misses, yez foller. We'll wait for him down t' Cross Roads; the crater's gone alone—and it's two to wan."

They moved on then, whilst Margot lay trem-

bling and sick; only too well she knew that Edward's life was threatened, that these men would stick at nothing to gain their unholy ends. One thought only was with her; she must save him.

It was a good six miles to Creanadon, and there were no houses between, except a few wretched disconnected hovels where it would be vain to look for assistance.

If only she could meet Edward before he reached the Cross Roads and persuade him to return until a police escort had been given, all would be well.

She sprang to her feet; if she dared pass through the darkening wood she would get a good start of the assassins.

Her heart throbbed with fear. In every dim nook she saw some enemy; the crackling of the twigs beneath her feet sent little shafts of horror and pain through all her lithe young body. But with a prayer for help she set her face steadily towards her goal, and long before Bourke and his companion had turned the bend of the road she had issued from the gloom, and was running with all her speed towards the Cross Roads. Then her strength failed her; she sank on the grass to rest and regain her breath.

In the distance she heard the faintest sound of wheels, on the other side came the echo of heavy steps, and she knew the enemy was approaching.

With one mighty effort she lifted herself and started once again. Through the dense mist she could just descry the outlines of a horse and gig, she ran to meet it, crying,—

"For the love of Heaven, stop!"

The driver reined in, asking sharply,—

"Who are you? What do you want?"

A sob of utter thankfulness lifted her throat.

"I am Margot—let me get up!"

Edward's heart gave a great throb of joy as the girl climbed in. It was bliss to be near her, even though the bliss must be followed by pain.

"What are you doing here?" he asked, as steadily as he could. "Have you lost your way in the mist?"

"Turn your horse's head," was her answer; "Barney Bourke and Shandy O'Rourke are behind us, and they have threatened to kill you. I came to save you if possible; drive as fast as you can to Creanadon!"

"No," he said, sternly; "I will face these ruffians; to fly would be to proclaim myself a coward, and to encourage them in their violence."

"Think of me!" she entreated, "I am only a girl, and they are armed."

In her heart she feared only for him; and for Decima's sake she would keep him safe; death had lost its sting for her.

In her earnestness she laid her little cold hand upon his arm, saying,—

"Be wise; bravery alone will not save you. Oh, may Heaven defend us now; they are upon us! Don't spare Meg. Keep your head low."

"I, too, am armed," Edward answered, grimly, "and I will shoot the first dog that attempts violence! It is useless, Margot, to try for Creanadon; every peasant along the road is hostile to me. We must face these brutes, but they shall not harm you."

Even as he spoke Barney Bourke, rushing forward, caught at the reins, he was quickly followed by O'Rourke with his pistol cocked.

"What do you mean by this outrage?" demanded Margot, fiercely. "Barney, let the horse go!"

"Miss Margot honey! this has naught to do w' yez; git out an' walk quiet home; me and Shandy wants a wee bit talk w' Misher Ripon."

"You blackguards!" cried Edward; "out of the way, or I'll punish you as you deserve. Let go there, Bourke. I will settle matters with you when there is no lady near."

"Och, his honor wad hide himself ahint t' petticoats!" sneered Shandy. "It's a moighty brave broth o' a bhoys, he is, Miss Margot."

"Do not dare address me," she began, passionately, when Edward, one hand upon the reins, the other deep in his breast-pocket, said in a peculiarly low impressive tone,—

"Oh, Meg, on—"

feeling Bourke's rough hand upon her, then made a violent effort to escape.

Quick as lightning O'Rourke raised his weapon, but Margot was quicker than he; snatching at the whip she struck the pistol upwards, so that the bullet was harmlessly discharged; then she brought the lash down sharply across the miscreant's face. With a howl he fell prostrate to the ground, half-stunned by the vigorous blow she had dealt.

Bourke, releasing Meg, sprang to his comrade's relief, but Edward was on guard; he did not wish to kill the hulking brute, only to cripple him, so he aimed low, and his bullet found its billet in his right arm; the next moment he was standing helpless and cursing on the roadways whilst Meg was tearing homewards at a most terrific pace. Then Edward said,—

"Margot—Margot! why did you come to my rescue?"

She was all but fainting; her weary eyes scarcely lifted themselves to the handsome face above as she answered,—

"Do not ask me."

"But I must. Did you find you cared for me just a little too well to let me die the violent death those men would have compassed but for you?"

"Take the truth in all its shameful nakedness," she said, desperately, "I love you! I would die over and over again, if that were possible, to avert danger or sorrow from you."

"Then why did you lie to me? Oh, little one, darling one, what havoc you have wrought; what possessed you so to scorn me?"

"Decima loved you, and is worthy you; I could never have made you happy; and, and, oh it is better as it is."

"No, no," but he spoke to deaf ears for the girl had fainted.

Luckily they were near The Dowel House, but he kissed her cold lips passionately before he could consign her to Decima's keeping.

CHAPTER VII.

DECIMA sat alone the following morning wearing a look of care. She was depressed, unhappy, although she could scarcely give a name to her unhappiness. She was troubled, she told herself because of the danger threatening Edward, because the danger he had escaped seemed but the forerunner of others. But deep down in her heart was an uneasy remembrance of his agitation as he carried Margot in the previous evening; once again she saw the slender figure clasped close in his arms, his face bowed above the whiteness of the smooth cheeks; and in his eyes was a look that had never shone for her.

Then, when Margot returned to consciousness, had not her first words been, "Edward! Edward! was I in time? Is he safe?" and scarcely could she (Decima) reply before her glance strayed to him, and covering her face, she wept aloud.

All these things might be due to the danger they had together shared, and yet—and yet—Decima was decidedly miserable. It was quite in vain, she told herself, that "had not Edward loved her best he never would have asked her to become his wife;" mistakes had happened before, and doubtless would happen again, but, if this thing should be, if, after all, Margot was dearest to him, then, Heaven forbid he should link his life to hers. Heaven send her wisdom to order her ways for his good, and strength to set him free, if indeed he desired freedom.

There was neither malice nor anger in her heart, neither could find any abiding place there. Edward had once said she was "a fair saint," and he did not much exaggerate. He had quoted, too, words from a sweet singer, peculiarly applicable to her.

It had been on the way to the little Protestant church below the hill, and she was gowned in white. He had taken her slender fingers in his with a touch that was reverential, as he said, "I ought to be a better man for your sake,

Decima; you recall to me a certain poem picture of which I am fond; one verse runs thus,—

"Thy dress was like the lilies, and thy soul as pure as they,
One of God's holy messengers did walk with me that day."

Remembering these things, she hid her face in her hands; but she neither sobbed nor wept—only she thought "there was affection and esteem in his voice, in his eyes, but not love. Then why? why, did he ask me to be his wife? Did he deceive himself, or did I let him see just a little too plainly all that he was to me?"

A slow step outside startled her: hastily taking up some work she applied herself to it assiduously, not glancing up until Margot's voice said, listlessly, "how industrious we are this morning! and why did you leave me to sleep so long?"

"I thought you would need some extra rest after the excitement and fatigue of yesterday," answered Decima, calmly stitching away as though for dear life; but from under her lashes she shot a keen, inquiring look at her little sister, and as she looked she sighed, "I don't know how to be sufficiently thankful that you both escaped without injury, Margot; I can only hope that the course Edward has taken will not expose him to further risks—he has had Bourke and O'Rourke arrested and conveyed to Greenadon."

Margot caught her breath sharply, but answered steadily,—

"He has done well; half-measures will not now serve him, and you, dear Decima, must uphold him in all he does. Soon he will be your husband; either you take his side or that of his enemies."

Decima laid aside her work, pacing to and fro; then, suddenly, she went and knelt beside Margot, putting an arm around her waist.

"Tell me all about it, Mavourneen, you were too ill, and Edward, too excited last night for me to master anything but the barest details."

And whilst the younger sister graphically described all that had passed, making little of her own share in the adventure, she listened with her head drooped, and the fear in her heart taking form until it grew to terrible proportions.

Presently, Edward arrived, but although his *fancie* watched him keenly, she could see no change in his manner, and Margot was as flippant of speech as ever; yet that doubt lingered, growing daily stronger, when, as their bridal morning drew nearer, Edward did not grow fonder, and Margot's face was thinner than it should be. Margot's sunny temper, less sunny, though her laughter was more frequent.

Neither guessed that she suspected the truth; neither realised the heartache she was enduring; but each tacitly avoided the other so far as was possible. Christmas came and went; it wanted very few days now to the wedding, and almost all the country people had been asked.

Dion Fitzgerald was home again and had again renewed his proposal, to be summarily rejected; he was furious, especially when he heard the story of Margot's adventure, and listened to his mother's words,—

"Mr. Ripon is going to marry Decima; but it is Margot he loves. I have it on the best of authority, and I firmly believe that Margot refused you just because she loves him—though why they did not make a match of it puzzles me."

If only he could remove Edward. Better still if he could disgrace him in the girl's eyes. Proud as she was, Margot would never countenance a man whose name was the target for scorn. So he cast about in his mind how best to accomplish his plan. He was an officer, supposedly a gentleman, yet he began to consort with the low ruffians who had been Denny's boon companions, and who now needed only a master mind to re-organise them and misdirect their talents. It was not long before Dion made them understand his purpose; but he did not take into account that Margot was now as much hated as she had been previously beloved. Had she not saved the Saxon's life? Was she not a traitress to her country? and had not her evidence condemned Barney and Shandy to long terms of imprisonment?

If the "new squire" must suffer so should she, although "there was no made at all, at all, to tell Mither Fitzgerald this."

But their wits were slow in moving, and they could not quite resolve as to the nature of their revenge on this young and innocent girl, who had long been their staunch ally, and helped them out of her own scanty purse.

They were a little scared too by the arrest of the three most daring of their clique, and whilst they waited the end of all was drawing nearer than they could dream—and it was not the end for which their vile souls longed.

The wedding eve! Decima, seated amidst her bridal finery, felt her heart sink ever lower and lower; she could not rest, she could not be at peace. Hurriedly rising she threw a heavy cloak about her head and shoulders, and escaped to the garden.

It was quite dark, although the night was young, and she could see nothing; but the sound of voices drew her near to the gate.

Strength and movement alike failed her as, screened by the tall bushes, she heard Margot say wallingly,—

"Oh! why must you pass by to find me here, and to-night of all nights? Go, I implore you, Edward. To-morrow you will call Decima wife, and it is to meet you and I should stand here as lovers. My prayer to you is 'forgive me,' and in token of that forgiveness, never let my sister guess she is not the first and dearest with you."

"As Heaven is my witness, Margot, I have honestly tried to avoid you; this meeting is not less cruel to me than to you. Yet, love, my love, kiss me once before we part for ever."

"No, no, no! Shall I wrong Decima at the last! Oh, be true to yourself, and in time you will forget as I pray I too may forget."

"One thing you must tell me," he broke in, sharply, "why, if then you loved me, did you send me away, making me believe you cared for Dion Fitzgerald?"

There was a moment's pause, during which Decima feared they must hear her heart beat, then Margot said,—

"I had learned by chance that Decima loved you, and oh! she is so much more worthy your love than I; I felt that she never could forget, that her life would be one long, long chapter of misery, and so—so I did violence to my own heart. Oh, no, no, do not touch me, you shall not think I have done anything worthy of praise for Decima has been sister, mother, friend to me," her voice died out then, and the unhappy listener fled through the garden to her own room, the most wretched bride elect beneath the heavens.

For her sake Margot had sacrificed love and hope, for her sake Edward would fulfil the compact into which his heart had never entered.

It was divinest pity and true affection he had given her, but could she be content with pity who wanted love? Or satisfied with affection when her heart cried hungrily for devotion? She never could marry Edward now; yet how could she break her word without creating scandal?

She flung herself on her knees, entreating,—
"Heaven help me! Heaven succour me! my need is great, but Margot's is greater. She is so young—so pitifully young—and so brave."

Much later, as she folded her shabby dress, and put away her veil, she breathed,—

"I shall never wear either now; in some way I shall find an escape for him, and for Margot," and then Margot's hand was on the door, and her voice clear and steady said,—

"Let me come in, Decima; I want to say goodnight. I am getting to bed early because to-morrow will be a long and trying day for us."

Quiet and serene she opened the door, to see Margot standing white but calm, with a great glory on her face (for had she not fought with and conquered self?) and her gray eyes were luminous.

"Heaven's blessing be with you now and always," she said tenderly. "May you never know sorrow or suffering; oh, my dear, oh, my dear, how sorely I shall miss you. But my loss will be Edward's gain, and may he always appreciate the prize he has won."

When she was gone, Decima went back to her

bedside, and there—kneeling—prayed for help in this her most cruel dilemma.

The hours went by; she paid no heed to them—was not even disturbed by the roystering songs of Denny's friends as they returned from their nightly carouse.

Suddenly one of the ill-conditioned fellows, who paid court to the kitchen-maid, paused.

"Boys," he whispered hoarsely, "t'light is in Miss Margot's room, will we smoke her out?"

Not a dissenting voice was raised; duly the necessary articles were gathered together quietly, speedily—a light applied; it burned but slowly, but so much the better since it gave the scoundrels time to escape, once The Dover House caught it would burn like tinder, being old, and mostly composed of wood.

Past midnight! Decima had scarcely moved since Margot's departure; suddenly however, she started up; surely there was a smell of fire, and a crackling of abravelling wood; she paused to listen.

Then she ran to her door: the corridor was full of smoke; the house was on fire.

"Margot, Margot!" she cried, but no voice answered; she ran to her father's room. "Wake, wake! or you will be burned to death," then she hurried to Margot's aid.

Flames and dense volumes of smoke met her on her way, she never stayed or heeded; bursting into her sister's chamber, she saw her lying fully dressed upon her bed, but in a state nearly akin to suffocation.

Mr. St. Patrick had rushed in behind.

"The maids have gone, the escape by the staircase is cut off."

"Drop out from the window—you can let yourself down by the vine. Get a ladder—quick—quick or she will die," and then as he obeyed she flew back to the girl upon the bed. "Margot Margot, for Heaven's sake speak."

A head appeared at the window, a voice—Edward's—said,—

"Come, Decima, there is time yet. I will return for Margot."

"No, you must take her first. Where is father?"

"Lying stunned upon the ground—he fell—but, Decima—"

CHAPTER VIII.

"Not another word; I will not leave until she is safe, and I am not afraid," and seeing she was immovable, he took Margot in his arms, descending the ladder as rapidly as he could with his burthen.

But with all the haste he made, the flames were belching out of the window before he reached the ground. In another instant they might catch the ladder, and Decima must then perish for her heroism.

Never, oh! never!

The thought of her danger nerved him to fresh efforts. Giving Margot into the care of another neighbour, he once more ascended through all the dense smoke and the blinding flames. He saw the white serene face of his bride-elect shining with a great light; but even as he looked, her hands went up in a futile effort to ward off the scorching fire; her gown was suddenly ablaze, and careless of himself Edward dashed through the window, caught the counterpane from the bed, wrapped her in it, thus extinguishing the flames, and hastened to escape ere escape became impossible.

It was no light matter to carry Decima, for she was tall and well proportioned; she lay too, a dead weight upon his arms, having fainted.

But the task was accomplished at last, and Margot, who thanks to her strong vitality, had quickly recovered, was the first to minister to that dear sister's needs.

Not a moment too soon had Edward reached the ground; the ladder was now all ablaze, soon it fell with a crash, and it was evident to all that the whole house was doomed; long before assistance could arrive it would be reduced to a smouldering heap of ruins.

One and another offered the St. Patrick's shelter; but Edward, returning thanks on their

behalf, said that his was the only roof beneath which they should rest, and for Decima's sake it would be well to hasten their departure.

Touching Mr. St. Patrick lightly he urged him to rouse himself; he staggered to his feet, looking with haggard eyes upon the ruin of his home, then he broke into the bitter tears of manhood grown old and weary with many struggles against an untoward fate.

"Homeless! almost penniless! I wish to Heaven I had been left to die!"

"No, no, dear father," said Margot, clinging to him, "we could not spare you; and now for Decima's sake let us be going; she lies so white and still that—that I am afraid—"

He suffered her to lead him to a carriage which had been placed at their disposal, and which now conveyed them, together with the village medico, towards Castle Patrick, Edward riding beside them. He had been among the first to see the flames rising against the dark sky, and had ridden over at once, rousing other neighbours on his way.

As they went Dion Fitzgerald ran hastily into the roadway, crying—

"For the love of Heaven tell me Margot is safe—"

"She is safe," Edward answered tersely, and with a keen glance at the other. "If you were so anxious, why did you not volunteer your assistance? I did not see you on the spot. Drive on," and the young man was compelled to stand aside that they might pass.

And not one word had Margot uttered, not one glance had she given from her sweet eyes; and he of the guilty conscience slunk away, well-knowing who had perpetrated the foul deed, and afraid lest discovery should ensue, and they drag his name with theirs through the mire.

They had been "revengeful tools" in his "revengeful hand," but they had struck where he would have spared, committing a mad deed which brought no benefit to themselves or him.

"I was a fool to tamper with them," he reflected, and for once he esteemed himself at his proper value.

Very white and serene Decima lay upon her bed; her beautiful face and column-like throat had suffered no injury, but her shapely hands and arms were touched by the fire, and even these were not badly burned; yet she was prostrate.

By her own request she had that morning seen the doctor alone, and noting the added gravity of his face asked, quietly—

"Shall I get well, doctor? You need not fear to answer me truthfully; death has no sting for me, and if I am dying there is something for me to do before I pass away."

He regarded her with infinite compassion. She was so beautiful, life seemed to hold so many possibilities of happiness for her that it was doubly hard for him to give his verdict; only under the fixed regard of those grand, calm eyes, he could not prevaricate.

"Miss St. Patrick, I will not bid you hope; I greatly fear you will succumb to the shock to your system. Of course I am not infallible, and I would be glad if you would have further advice."

"I am content with yours," she answered gently, and being once more alone, she closed her eyes, murmuring—

"Oh, Heaven I thank thee, that thou hast heard my prayer; now Margot will be happy, and I shall be at rest."

Later she sent for Edward and Margot; to her father she had already broken the news, and he sat by her bed, his head upon the pillows beside hers, not making any mean or outcry, but looking very broken down and feeble.

Margot moved to her father's side, whilst Decima motioned Edward to sit at her right hand.

(Continued on page 622.)

POOR LITTLE LINNET.

—302—

CHAPTER X.

"Do you know that it has only just occurred to me, Miss Lethbridge," Lord Bourdillon said to Linnet, "that I have never once yet apologised to you for my ill-temper and rudeness on the evening that we first met? Will you pardon me now when I tell you that at the time, being mentally harassed in no ordinary degree, I was really scarcely myself? I was worse than a brute to you, I believe—and I am truly sorry for it. Until this moment, I think I have had no fair opportunity of asking your pardon. Will you withhold it now?"

She took her hands from the keys of the spinet and lifted her eyes rather shrinkingly to his again.

She tried hard to smile in an easy friendly sort of way.

"Perhaps I was not over-civil to you, Lord Bourdillon," said Linnet gently. "Looking back indeed to that evening—"

"Civil? Oh, yes, you were civil enough," he interrupted her, laughing. "Quite civil and forbearing."

"At any rate, like you, on that evening," rejoined Linnet, "I was scarcely myself. You did not by any means see me at my best just then, you know. So let it be a mutual absolution, Lord Bourdillon."

"With all my heart," said he, looking straight down at her, as she sat there so small and shy beneath him.

And then Linnet grew cold and nervous once more, and wished very much that he would go away and leave her to herself.

Try how she would to overcome the sensation, she could never feel thoroughly at ease when Derrick Bourdillon was near her.

A pause ensued—a long uncomfortable pause.

He stared at her thoughtfully, lingeringly; and then turned away to Irene.

"Irene, it is not a bit of use—just look here at this! It is really labour thrown away with me. I shall give up trying."

Irene raised her exquisite face from the sketch over which she was bending silently, and smiled a little absently at Linnet's impetuously-uttered words.

"Don't say that, dear. Sponge it out and try again," she advised. "You will succeed in the end if you only persevere."

"Sponge it out!" echoed Linnet ruefully. "I have done nothing, I think, but sponge, sponge ever since I began this morning. I tell you, Irene, it is not in me—it never was. I shall never, never learn to wield brush or pencil respectably. If I were to go on persevering from this hour until I was fifty, I am certain that I should never get beyond the sponging stage and this eternal rubbing out."

"Ah, Linnet, dear! Remember King Bruce and the spider," said Irene sentimentally; and forthwith turned to her brook again, whilst Linnet made impatient answer—

"Oh, Irene, I always did hate that spider."

They—Irene Noble and Linnet—were in the study at Windyaste, seated together in a large window of the room which overlooked the Italian garden.

In their rear burned a bright wood fire; for the day was a dull November one, with a leaden sky, a mist in the air, and with moisture dripping from the branches of the trees.

The grounds at Windyaste, with their once gay porticoes, were now all brown and damp, the greensward was slippery, and the shrubs had a lean and dejected look.

The gray heavens indeed were so low that the bare chestnut trees in the distance seemed to touch them. Never a breath of wind was astir, and hushed were the voices of the shivering birds.

Recently Irene Noble had been instructing little Linnet in the art of watercolour drawing. Irene herself drew correctly and gracefully.

Only to glance at a drawing which her white hand

had executed was more than sufficient to convince Linnet Lethbridge of the utter hopelessness of her endeavouring or ever hoping to do likewise.

But Irene would insist that Linnet must "persevere;" and "persevering," accordingly, was Linnet that morning.

She had come over to Windyaste immediately after breakfast, on purpose to take her lesson from Irene in the study window. They always sat together there when the light was bad—such as it was to-day.

Lord Bourdillon himself had walked over from the Abbey with Linnet; and now he was absent shooting with Gordon Noble.

If the truth must be recorded of her, Linnet, about this time, was hardly so mentally happy and content as assuredly she ought to have been; for every reasonable blessing was hers that mortal young woman could wish for—friends to love her, and a beautiful old home to shelter her always.

Still there was the crumpled rose-leaf—the worm in the bud.

And yet, as to when it began, she could never recall exactly.

But Gordon Noble's coldness towards her, like everything else, must have had some sort of a beginning, she supposed forlornly.

It seemed almost to break her heart when the awakening came—when she awoke first to the cruel consciousness that he actually, and sometimes openly so, avoided her.

And she had been foolish enough to dream that he might perhaps learn to care for her just a little bit, in a brotherly sort of way, by-and-by.

Once he had shown himself so considerate and kind towards her always, with a certain tender solicitude for her orphaned state; but now—lately—Oh, she could not bear to think about it. It hurt too much.

Yes, he had somehow altered strangely—why she could not imagine—she only knew that she fretted over and mourned the change in him secretly, very grievously sometimes.

"You are not what you were, Robin!"

she sang softly to herself one day, when quite alone; but the tears welled up unexpectedly, and her little song came to a broken and piteous conclusion—so that she could sing no more.

For the last week or so Linnet had seen barely anything of Gordon Noble.

The steward's books had now been handed over to Derrick Bourdillon in his new character of reformed prodigal, and Mr. Noble himself no longer came over to the Abbey in the early morning to listen to the troubles of the Countess and hold consultation with the bailiff after breakfast.

It was not necessary for Gordon to do that now.

For the Countess had her own son by her side again, her natural protector, and master of the house.

It did one's heart good, only to see how proud and happy she was—and yet Heaven knew poor Linnet's was heavy enough!

Up to this date Derrick Bourdillon had kept his vow religiously, and even his neighbours, the county people round about, seemed disposed to forgive and forget all past misdeeds, and to receive him once more as an honoured member into their well-regulated community, drawing favourable conclusions from his remarkable good behaviour, which never had been known to endure for so long in any one of his many previous "reformations" at the Abbey.

"The black sheep," they reasoned amongst themselves, "is surely weary of wandering and ill-doing at last! So let him come amongst us again for a trial at least. We will keep him in the fold with us, and save him if we can."

And so there were a few stiff, pompous, and exceedingly dull dinners and receptions, to celebrate the black sheep's return—in short, the fatted calf was killed in honour of the prodigal son.

Generally every morning Mr. Noble and the Earl rode out together, inspecting the farms upon the Dreadmere estate and the lands appertaining thereunto.

As a rule the bailiff accompanied them, and answered his lordship's questions.

PHIDIAS understood the art of softening ivory so as, from a single tusk, to produce a plate from 12 to 20 inches broad.

The tenants all augured well, it was said, from the Earl's reappearance in their midst; but Linnet somehow believed that in their inmost hearts they sincerely regretted Gordon Noble's withdrawal from office, so to say.

He had been as it were their deputy landlord for so long; he had endeared himself to all; for the future they would miss him greatly.

His own people, however, on the Windy waste estate would gain and benefit by the change of rule; because would not they now have Gordon entirely to themselves, since Lord Bourdillon had at length reformed and resolved to govern his own?

Home influence, rest, and tranquillity of life had done much for Derrick Bourdillon. The improvement in him was in every wise remarkable.

Linnet used frequently to find herself marveling at his gentleness and softened manner; the love and respect he showed for his mother; and furthermore the deference and courtesy he displayed invariably towards herself.

Still grateful as she was in a way for all his attention and notice, she would infinitely have preferred that he should leave her alone.

For one thing, she feared that he should discover the fact of her secret discontent and unhappiness, and perchance tax her with it—and that she would not have for the world.

Ah, no! she would suffer and be strong in silence—her troubles were nothing to Derrick Bourdillon.

The painting lesson with Irene in the study at Windy waste on that dim November morning seemed a greater trial to the flesh than usual.

The paints were bad, Linnet averred, and the light was worse; the brushes had in them superfluous hairs.

Ere long she discovered that the paper was grey—Linnet's patience, in brief, was failing her fast.

"I declare I will not do any more—I have done for to-day," she exclaimed at last, real tears of despair swimming in her eyes. "The green has run into the blue, and I cannot tell where to go on. Oh, Irene, let us put the things away until another time. I am so sick of it all."

"I have just this moment finished," Irene returned, this time without lifting her beautiful face, and giving a few rapid touches to the sketch on her block as she spoke. "There—now it is done! What do you think of it, Linnet darling?"

But before Linnet could reply, the window outside was darkened suddenly, and both girls looked up quickly together.

The Earl and Gordon Noble were standing outside, looking in, their guns under their arms, and their bags slung across their shoulders. Two big dogs of the setter breed stood shivering and muddy behind them.

"Come, are not you ready, Linnet?" Lord Bourdillon called through the window. They had promised the Countess to return home, in time to have luncheon with her at the Abbey.

Linnet nodded to him gravely for answer, and rose at once to put on her things. They were lying on a chair in the study, and she was soon equipped for the homeward walk.

Derrick Bourdillon, smiling, lifted his cloth hat to Irene, and tapped his heavy boots and spiny gaiters with his gun, thus intimating that he could not enter. So Linnet kissed Irene, and said good-bye, and, going out straightway, found the two men talking quietly at the hall-door.

"Do come in," Gordon was saying—"just for a glass of sherry or something. You want it."

"Thank you, not this morning," the other made answer; "we are late as it is, and are keeping the mother waiting. Good-bye, old fellow."

Timidly Linnet extended then her fingers to Gordon. He just took them for a second in his own, and let them go again.

She could have cried out in bitterness at his coldness, but held her peace, of course, turning her head gently aside.

"Good-bye, Miss Lethbridge," he said.

"Linnet," remarked Bourdillon, as they left the house and took the homeward path, "the ground is very wet and slippery hereabout—you must take care!"

His gun was now resting on his right shoulder, but the left arm near Linnet was free.

So he drew her cold and passive little hand beneath his disengaged arm, and held it closely there.

When they passed within view of the study window, Irene was still standing in the embrasure looking out. But on seeing Linnet and her companion, she vanished abruptly, Linnet noticing that one hand had gone swiftly to her bosom, as though a deadly pain had pierced her there as she stood.

An impulse stirred in little Linnet, and she snatched her arm from the Earl's side. At that moment she hated herself, and Derrick Bourdillon too.

"Linnet child," he exclaimed, astonished, "what is the matter with you? What do you mean?"

He looked hurt. There was a note of real pain in his voice.

"I can walk alone, thank you," she said. "I would rather. The ground is not in the least slippery. Why should you say that it was?"

A dark, wrathful shadow stole transiently into his deep eyes, and upon his dark brows sat a heavy frown. Linnet stepped briskly on ahead of him; he followed sullenly with his dog and gun. The animal's coat was as wet and bemirched as were his master's thick boots and leather gaiters.

When they arrived at the running stream over which the rustic bridge was thrown—the little bridge with the fanciful hand-rail—the fog was very dense just there. It hung over the chill rippling water like smoke from a sullen bonfire. The plank itself was slimy and dank with it, and so was the rustic rail. It clung like rime to the trailing brambles, and addened the reeds and grasses far worse than a heavy rain could have done.

Linnet marched unaided safely across the bridge, and then glanced over her shoulder at Derrick Bourdillon.

The moisture was glistening in his crisp black beard, and all about his Norfolk shooting-jacket and slouched cloth hat.

And he was looking, she thought, tired—fagged—and appeared to stoop a little.

As he regained her side, he coughed suddenly. It was a cough at once so hard and hollow, so grating and sepulchral, that Linnet stopped a moment in the wet grass involuntarily as the sound smote on her ear.

"With such a cough as that you should not be out in this horrid fog, I am very sure," she said severely. "You should have worn a top-coat or something, and not that loose pleated jacket, Lord Bourdillon. How careless and foolhardy men are," said little Linnet hotly.

"The idea of a great strong fellow like me taking cold, and shooting in a top-coat!" laughed he; and then he coughed again.

"You should not be out in this fog to-day, Lord Bourdillon, and you know it," said Linnet emphatically, hurrying on as fast as she could.

"Because I do not believe that you are as strong as you look."

He shrugged his shoulders, and frowned impatiently, striding on leisurely by her side. Linnet now was well-nigh out of breath, though her pace was nothing to him. The remainder of the way they trudged in silence—all across the dreary expanse of misty autumnal parkland, and past the great still mere, where the moisture dripped audibly from the branches to the water, which to-day had a leaden hue.

In the Gothic hall at the Abbey they met the Countess. Somehow Linnet had fancied of late that Lady Bourdillon always looked pleased and satisfied whenever she and the Earl were found together.

Meeting them now, that same pleased hopeful expression at once lit up the waxen features of Lady Bourdillon.

Linnet marked it well, and it worried and puzzled her rather as usual—as yet she was far from reading aright that enigmatical smile of the Countess's.

"You had better change those damp boots, Linnet," Lady Bourdillon said with solicitude.

"before we sit down to luncheon. I must not have you taking cold on any account."

"I rarely take cold," answered Linnet carelessly. "But, god-mother dear, you should advise Lord Bourdillon to change his. He has been coughing horribly all across the park."

And she mounted the stairs, humming up to her self indifferently, and unfastening her cloak as she went.

"Derrick, my darling," the Countess cried out quickly, the shadow of a great unuttered fear as it were falling on her heart, and rendering her voice unsteady, "is this true?"

"No," he answered sharply; "Linnet exaggerates absurdly. I say, mother dear, I'm awfully hungry, and shall be ready for luncheon in less than a minute. Linnet"—calling up to her—"make haste down, and stick to facts for the future."

"I always stick to facts, Lord Bourdillon, as you call it," Linnet called back quietly; and went on to her room.

The Countess's lips looked drawn and pale as she moved slowly and thoughtfully towards the dining-room door.

There was no smile on them now.

CHAPTER XL

THE autumn and winter months passed away, and in due season the lovely spring-time came round once more.

Yet with the spring arrived trial and sorrow, and shadows once again closed darkly around the gray old walls of Dreamere Abbey.

The intervening months which were gone had but served to widen and emphasise the gulf between Linnet and Gordon Noble—certainly they had not drawn the two any nearer to each other.

The breach was so decided, yet somehow so vague in itself, so inexplicable and yet withal so plain, that Linnet in her disappointment and perplexity knew not how or where to look back in the past in order to discover the first faintest traces of the singular estrangement.

As a woman she was too proud to let him see that his indifference, after his kindness, was almost more than she could bear—that his neglect and insistent coldness, after his brotherly solicitude, would crush all the spirit out of her ere long.

Nor could she seek any confidante—much less sue for an explanation.

Not even to Irene, for whom she had conceived so great an affection, could Linnet lay bare the weary secret of her deep unhappiness. She preferred to suffer in silence and let this miserable condition of affairs continue uninterruptedly.

But perhaps Irene, in her own heart, knew more than Linnet guessed just then.

Still those days which were gone had brought sunshine in their train as well as cloud; and the Countess herself, for one, at any rate, possessed a heart that rejoiced and was glad exceedingly.

For the present spring beheld Derrick Bourdillon's complete restoration into the good opinion and graces of the surrounding neighbourhood.

Should he continue to walk—so to put it—so circumspectly as he had walked of late, the county people evidently would be ready to condone the past, and to let it be henceforth amongst them as though it had never been in all its evil character and unquestionable ugliness of aspect.

And that he still intended to merit this newly-acquired favour of his old friends and neighbours was obvious now to all who knew him.

People could scarcely believe, indeed, that this man was really the self-same Derrick Bourdillon whom they had known so well for his wildness in the bygone time—the Derrick Bourdillon of whom, perhaps, they had heard more than they had actually seen, whom they had feared and shunned as a human soul lost hopelessly, whose sins and reckless life were proverbial on the country side for miles round Dreamere Abbey,

the venerable home which of late years had seen so little of its rightful master.

"Upon my life, missy," one day said Mrs. Kidd wheezily to Linnet, "how wonderful his lordship has changed surely. And Providence be thanked for it, say I, Miss Linnet. Why, dearie me, I shall very soon begin to love him again just as I used to, when he was a little dark-haired, dark-eyed mite in pinafore—that I shall, missy!"

And then, too, Phoebe Slack, in confidence, thought fit to favour Linnet with her own opinion on the subject in question.

"I used to be downright afraid of his lordship, you know, ma'am, I did really used to," said she, with a sort of a wooden penitence, "and never even liked to hear him talked about at dark—it gave me the cold shivers. But there, since he has been home among us this time, he ain't seemed like the same gentleman—he ain't indeed! The change, the alteration in him is something more than wonderful, me and Aunt Kidd says sometimes, remembering what he was, you know, ma'am, not so very long ago."

Yes, everyone, it would seem, could detect the alteration for the better in the man, in one sense, and did not forget to comment upon this particular change; but it was strange, passing strange, thought Linnet, that they should all of them fail to mark another alteration—an alteration not for the better—in Derrick Bourdillon, which to the young girl's eyes at least was terribly plain; much more distinct, in fact, than the visible moral improvement they harped upon, Linnet herself not having known him in his younger and wicked days.

She wondered whether the Countess herself noted it—wondered whether the Nobles at Windy waste noted it—wondered indeed why all the world, their little world, did not mark it, and speak of it, the thing was so deadly clear to Linnet—this gradual subtle change which was stealing over him so surely unawares.

She knows now that the Countess his mother would not see it. She worshipped him, loved him so dearly, that mother of his, she would not think of what might happen in the future, and she closed her ears resolutely, fiercely, to the cruel whisperings of the warning voice.

He, her darling, was with her now, strong and well in the flesh, and why should he not remain so with her always? He was a young man still, quite young, not yet thirty by some years to come.

What, then, was there to fear?

And so in her strong, deep, mother-love, the Countess was willfully, trustfully blind, and time and affairs together went on unheeded until the bursting of the gathering storm.

It was a calm, sweet, and unusually warm April evening—a fair still evening with coral-pink streaks in the sky, and a wind breathing softly from the south-west.

The elms and shrubberies around the Abbey were budding and brightening daily, and the robins were building in the chapel wall where the clustering ivy grew thickest.

They were alone on that evening at Dreadmere Abbey, the recollection of which, more vividly perhaps than all other reminiscences of her girlhood, is stamped upon the pages of Linnet's memory.

She and the Countess had come in together from the dining-room, leaving the Earl sitting over his wine, thoughtful and preoccupied; and now in the drawing-room Lady Bourdillon was nodding visibly over her long knitting-needles, and soon would be in the land of dreams.

Linnet somehow was restless and could not sit still.

So presently she fetched a light wrap, and throwing it round her head and shoulders, wandered forth out into the sweet clear evening air, bare-headed and unhappy, to seek repose of mind.

She strolled by the ruins, on her way to the pleasure, past the melancholy old tower with its desolate ivy-crowned belfry-room.

The solitary bell, the Bourdillon Knell, loomed black and grim in the falling twilight through the ivied bars of the ruined window, whence the

weird bats were darting noiselessly, scaring the chafers and the swarming gnats.

The old-fashioned flowers in the pleasure-smelled sweet and moist from a recent watering—old-world flowers that had bloomed betimes, the spring being so early and genial a one—and the grasshoppers were chirping busily in the stinging-nettles which flourished round the fallen gray stones and granite blocks of the ruin.

By-and-by Linnet wandered through the chapel doorway, and stared unseeing at the weed-grown flags and the prostrate crumbling effigies, all weed-grown too.

It was all very quiet and lonely, not to say sad, the whole atmosphere of the place being almost oppressive in its utter restfulness and unbroken peace—nothing but decay and silence everywhere all round, and the pale, pink-streaked sapphire of a perfect heaven stretching far above the head of Linnet.

She scarcely knew whether she had strolled; she thought not about it, neither did she care, for her soul was burdened heavily that evening, and her young mind over-full.

Standing all alone there, she fell into a reverie—there amid the relics of an age long past and vanished for evermore.

Presently a footstep broke the silence; the tread came nearer and nearer; and towards her upon the evening air the odour of tobacco was wafted then.

Soon the footsteps echoed along the weed-grown paving of the cloisters; but Linnet did not stir.

Had she heard it—did she hear it now? Possibly yes—perhaps no.

"Linnet," a voice said gently at her side, "so I have found you!"

She started then from out of her troubled dreamland; started with a little gasping cry of affright and amaze to confront Derrick Bourdillon there in the gloaming.

"Ah, little Linnet," said he again, "so I have found you at last!"

And as he spoke, he cast away his half-smoked cigar, the end of it, where it lay smouldering among the rank weeds and grasses, glimmering fiery red in the amethyst dusk of the place.

"You!" she cried, collecting her scattered senses as best she might, and gathering her light wrap more closely about her, with a vexed and hasty movement, "is it you, Lord Bourdillon? Oh, why should you follow me to this deserted place when I wish to be alone here with my thoughts for sole company?" she added, with something more than a touch of petulance.

He made no answer for a moment or two, but kept his sombre eyes upon her face in a sort of doubtful, half-questioning gaze.

And then he folded his arms as he stood, and drew a deep sigh as if unconsciously.

He wore no light overcoat, as he mostly did now of an evening out of doors: he was dressed exactly as she had seen him at dinner.

"I have not precisely followed you, Linnet," he answered quietly, at length. "I found my mother alone and asleep; and, wanting you, I came out determined to find you. I could distinguish the outline of your little figure in here, through the cloisters from the pleasure."

"Oh, yes—I see—of course," rejoined Linnet, hurriedly now. "And now that you have found me, we will go in. Anything that you may wish to say to me, Lord Bourdillon, we will discuss indoors—it is growing chilly."

And she essayed to pass him, as if to lead the way. But he blocked it.

"No, Linnet. We will discuss it out here, if you please," he opposed slowly. "With exemplary patience, for some while past, I have been watching and waiting for this opportunity. The chance is too good a one to let slip, now that at last my patience has been rewarded."

"I do not understand you," she faltered; meaning that she would not understand.

Whereupon he repeated his foregoing speech calmly and distinctly enough.

"Lord Bourdillon," then said Linnet, with a little nervous strangled kind of laugh that she forced she knew not how, "you mystify me greatly. Do you want to quarrel with me? If so, let us begin at once and get it over quickly;

and then quit this place. It is rather an uncanny spot to wrangle in at dusk."

Over the ghostly belfry the sweet spring moon rose palely, touching the ivy with a silver radiance, and the broken rugged walls with patches of cold steel-blue. Near to the fair pale moon in the level cloudless sky,

"Lovely and lonely, a single star"

seemed to twinkle down earthward in mild surprise at those two dark figures in the ruins, standing there together amidst the moon-touched shadows.

Across the Earl's set features the moon-rays flickered fitfully. How sombre and deep his eyes looked, how black the crisp, thick beard! How white and determined the upper part of his face, as he remained there confronting Linnet, his arms still folded on his breast!

"Quarrel with you! Wrangle with you, Linnet!" he echoed sadly. "Why should you suppose such a thing? Nothing in the world at this moment, dear, could be farther from my thoughts."

"Oh, what is it that you want then?" she cried, distressed beyond endurance, wringing her hands involuntarily by her side in the folds of her gown.

He took a half step nearer to her, and instinctively Linnet stepped backward.

In doing this, her foot became entangled somehow in the skirt of her gown; and, after stumbling with no power to save herself, she settled finally in a sitting position upon a flat slab of rock or granite immediately behind her. She guessed that her resting-place was the tomb of some dead monk, and sickened and shivered at the thought.

Derrick Bourdillon followed at once and stood over her as she sat limply there.

"You ask me what is it that I want!" he demanded passionately, nay fiercely. "I want you, Linnet Lethbridge. You, do you hear and understand! Because I love you with all my strength and soul. I love you, dear, as only men of my wild nature can and do love. You must be mine, Linnet—I must and will have you for my wife!"

Had some unseen hand, as it were, from another world, passed its ice-cold fingering clutch around her heart to still its beats for ever, she could not have gasped and shuddered more than she did at that moment, in hearing those strange, wild words which issued from the mouth of Derrick Bourdillon—the son of the Countess, her revered godmother, the man whom his fellow-men had named "the black Earl!"

Conflicting emotions rendered her dumb.

Her arms dropped helplessly, weakly, beside her. She lifted her wan face mutely to his, but no speech came from between her parted lips.

"Speak—say something!" he pleaded, hoarsely, his voice full of mad entreaty, his sombre eyes on fire. "Do not look at me like that—it is too piteous! But speak—quick!—and tell me that you love me. Do you hear, Linnet, do you hear!"

And in his excitement he shook her roughly by the shoulder. And she, quailing from his touch, staggered dazedly up from her cold stone seat.

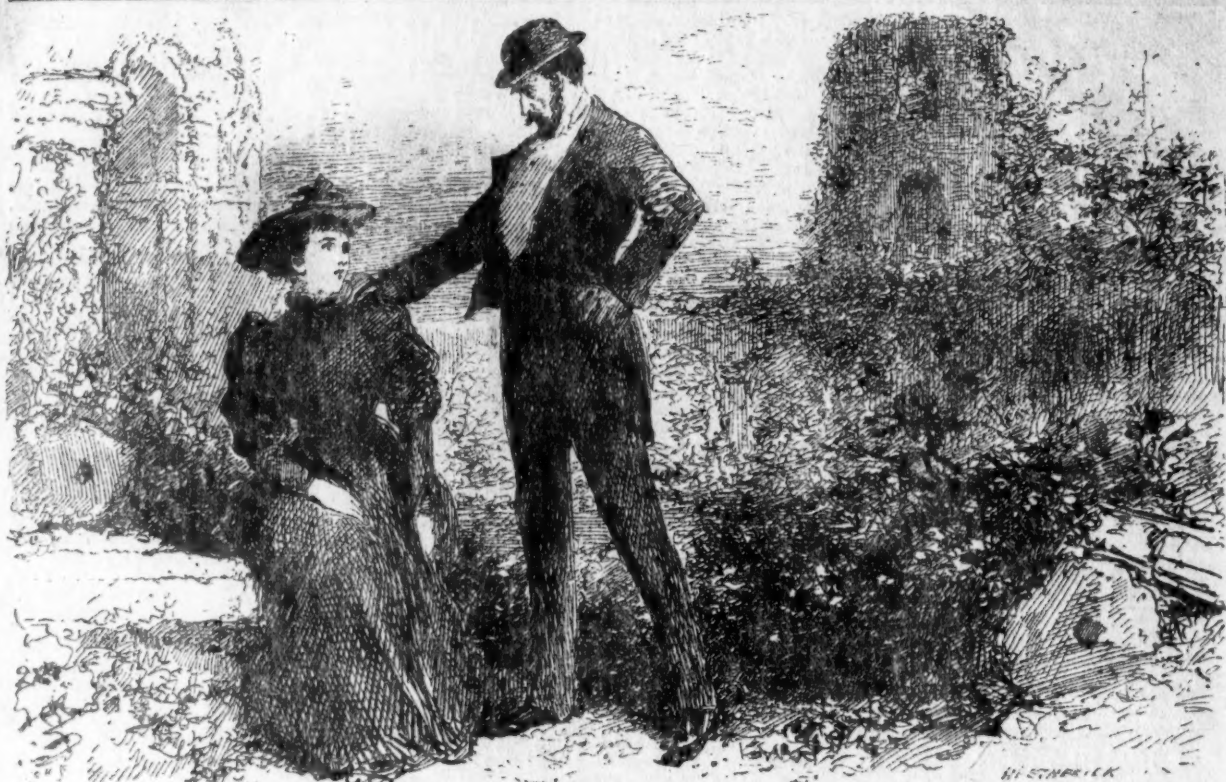
Then, facing him again, she pressed her hands upon her bosom and began to cry for very helplessness. She felt so frightened, so nervous, so miserable, that her tears fell fast, and she could not stem their flow.

In that ghastly, desolate unfrequented place she felt so utterly alone and in his power.

But still he could not force her to yield—strong as his own desires and will might be, her own should be stronger in this matter!

"I cannot—I cannot quite believe that you are fully aware of what you are saying, Lord Bourdillon," she sobbed, "You have hurt me—pained me—more than I can express. You have astonished me, too, more than I can say. I am certain that I have never given you the slightest reason to suspect—to conclude—that—that—Oh, pray let me pass and go into the house!" she broke off in another uncontrollable burst of unhappy tears.

Derrick Bourdillon smote his hands together, one heavily into the palm of the other.



"SPEAK—SAY SOMETHING! TELL ME THAT YOU LOVE ME," DERRICK PLEADED, HOARSELY.

"By Heaven!"—his real oath was a stronger one—"you shall not move a step hence until you have heard me out to the end!"

He gripped her wrist with one burning hand, and with the other lifted for a moment his hat from his damp white forehead.

His eyes gleamed wolfishly, almost cruelly, in the white moonlight, and Linnet, that instant, thought that he was going to kill her.

Brighter and brighter still shone out the pale spring moon; and darker and darker around them fell the mysterious, ivy shadows.

A frog began to croak in the long damp grass somewhere; and an owl, or some other grim bird of night, flew screeching mournfully from the ruined belfry room.

The dew was rising about the cloisters, and the oxen in the park lowed plaintively in the distance.

It was indeed growing very chilly now. Oh! would no one come and find them and interrupt them, prayed Linnet, wildly, and save her from Derrick Bourdillon!

Before he could proceed he coughed twice—hard and painfully.

"You shall hear me out," he said again, violently, well nigh breathless with passionate emotion. "You shall give me your answer afterwards."

"Linnet, my life, you know, heretofore has not been exactly what you would call the life of a good man—doubtless, far from it. At all events, the world would tell you so; I am not going to deny it now. Scores of times I have tried honestly to be a better man, and to lead the higher life, and scores of times I have failed and fallen in the old way. This time, likewise, Linnet, I should have failed and fallen, dear, had it not been for you—and you only! Dearest, dear little love, I was a different man from the very night I saw you for the first time in my life; and though I scarcely suppose that I could have actually loved you then, in that first moment of our meeting, I nevertheless felt vaguely at the time, that, if I

might only succeed by-and-by in the winning of your love in return for mine, it would be an easy enough matter then to turn my back for ever on the old life, the old companions, and the old temptations which had wrecked my youth.

"Although your sweet influence was already strongly upon me, as indeed it has been ever since, only in a subtler degree, we somehow did not get along together over-well on that first evening, did we, Linnet, my dear sweet little love! But we were such total strangers to each other, and things would go wrong between us, wouldn't they? Yet, even then, surly and bearish as I was, I knew well and understood that I had found at last the only woman I could ever love—ay, the only woman in the world I would ever make my wife; though, as I need not tell you, Linnet, fairer, infinitely lovelier faces than yours, little one, have times without number sought to enchain my senses with their fairness and their witchery.

"Well, day after day, dear little love, you have grown dearer and dearer to my soul, and men have marvelled at my redemption, as they call it, and unlooked-for steadiness and repentance. Naturally they predicted a fall, as I have fallen before, and they guessed not that it was the charm and power of one sweet little woman's influence and presence that held me firmly back from the old degradation.

"My dear mother, I am convinced, little Linnet, has long since divined my secret; though, so far, she has said to me no word concerning it. She is only too thankful, you see, dear, to know that love itself has proved my salvation; and that the one woman I have fixed my choice upon, is the very one in all the world after her own heart—her god-daughter, whom she loves as her own child.

"And, Linnet, you will surely break that tender loving heart of hers should you now refuse to listen to me—for, dear little soul, you know that it is utterly out of the question that I should remain a day longer at the Abbey, if—I if you throw me over and deny me what I ask."

He coughed once more, and wiped his lips with his handkerchief.

And in the moonlight Linnet saw distinctly the red stains of blood which soiled the snow-white cambric, ere he could hide it in his breast from her sight.

(To be continued.)

If a piece of cork is sunk 200 feet below the surface of the ocean, the pressure of the water will prevent it from rising.

STUFFED white doves, for funeral emblems, are prepared in large numbers in Jersey City. Their bodies are sold to French restaurants.

IN China no feature of society is more curious than the relation between master and servant. If the servant be of the military class, he is admitted to the intimate society of his master, but never assumes a liberty. At dinner, having taken his place with the utmost humility, he takes part in the conversation, addressing freely not only his master, but also guests of the highest rank. As soon as the meal is over, however, the servant retires with the utmost profound obedience and deference, and in no way will he venture to use his peculiar privilege, until the proper occasion permits.

AMONG the Anglo-Saxons every portion of the human body had a recognised monetary value, and anyone injuring the person of another had to pay his victim the legal price for the damage done. The parts of the face were more highly valued than any other portion of the body, showing how much importance was attached by our Saxon ancestors to their personal appearance. If a man in those days knocked out one of the front teeth of his neighbour he had to pay him 6s. as a compensation, but if he destroyed his beard he had to hand over no less than 20s. He might, however, break his countryman's thigh-bone for 12s., and his ribs for 3s. a-piece. He was allowed, of course, to smash up the members of an outlaw or of an enemy of his country gratis.



"YOU NEED NOT BE JEALOUS," KENNETH WHISPERED TENDERLY; "BELIEVE ME, DARLING, YOU HAVE NO CAUSE."

STEPCHILDREN OF FORTUNE.

CHAPTER VI.

ETTY STUART hardly knew whether she was glad or sorry to leave Barton, she had not the least vocation for teaching and had never felt the least interest in her pupils. It was, so far, rather a relief to think she should be free from the daily routine of elementary lessons varied by long walks and evenings of incessant needlework, but on the other hand, she would miss Kenneth Bertram; and her chance meetings with him had grown to be the brightest spots in her life.

Were they really "chance" meetings? Hardly, since each time they parted, the next trying place and hour was carefully fixed. Etty never asked herself what was to be the end of it all. She knew that she had promised to marry Bob, that she was leaving her situation at her father's express wish that she might have a quiet time at home before her wedding. Her future was all mapped out, her best years were to be spent in the dull, unfashionable neighbourhood of Ashley Green on strictly limited means; then, when youth was past and nothing mattered very much, she might perhaps be promoted to a suburban villa at Clapham or Brixton.

"I hate it all," said the girl to herself as she sat in the corner of a third-class carriage and was whirled rapidly towards London.

"I must have been an idiot to agree to it. Why, if only I had kept free, there was always the chance of something nice turning up. I might have had a husband like Mr. Bertram, with enough money to give me everything I fancied."

They had reached the junction where the little local train from Barton was attached to the main line express for London. Etty put her head out of the window, and then drew it quickly in again. Kenneth Bertram stood on the platform, and she did not want him to see her in a third-class compartment. Ken's eyes travelled rapidly down

the train till he caught sight of her; then, in a minute he had wrenched her door open.

"Come along," he said, quickly, "I've got a seat for you here."

A porter held open the door of a first-class carriage and said the train did not stop again before London Bridge. Ken tossed him a shilling and they were off with the certainty of an uninterrupted *tête-à-tête* for the next twenty minutes.

"Were you running away from me, Etty?" said Bertram, as he stroked the girl's little hand caressingly, "surely you guessed I should come and say good-by!"

"I did not know; I was not sure."

"Look here, child," said Kenneth, in the low, musical tone which was one of his greatest charms, "let's understand each other; you don't want to drop me, do you?"

"No, oh no, but—"

"Nothing else matters," said Mr. Bertram, indolently, "so long as you care to see me, I will manage the rest."

"But you can't possibly come to Church-street, you would feel dreadfully out of place at Ashley Green."

"Ashley Green! I never was there in my life; isn't it somewhere among the leather factories?"

"Yes, and I live there."

"Well, leather's a very healthy trade; and I daresay I can find my way there."

She looked at him with a pleading glance; never had she seemed so pretty, so fascinating, and Kenneth's conscience had an uneasy twinge. Was it fair to win this girl's heart when he had not the slightest intention of marrying her?

"You mustn't come," said Etty, gravely; "father and Elizabeth would be so angry."

The difficulty in his way only increased his ardour.

"Don't you think they would receive me friendly?" he asked, smiling, "wouldn't they give me a welcome for your sake?"

"No, oh! Mr. Bertram, Kenneth I have been

so wicked. I've wanted to tell you ever so many times only I was ashamed."

Ken's arm stole round her waist; he kissed the beautiful eyes in which the tears were gathering fast. He had grown very very fond of Etty in spite of that half-and-half engagement to his cousin Beryl.

"Tell me now," he whispered, gently, "I hope I am not so very terrible to you Etty. Come, we shall not have so very much more time together, what is troubling you, dear?"

And she told him; she sobbed out her story, somehow. Robert Dawson had loved her ever since she was a child, and the last time she was at home she had promised to marry him.

Kenneth had meant that meeting to be their last. Worldly wisdom, prudence, and perhaps a little remorse all urged the need for giving up Etty. He had thought she would fret a little over his defection and perhaps miss him a good deal at first. He had never dreamed there was a lover ready at hand to console her. She could not have devised a better way to make Bertram faithful than the confidence she had just made. He might have forsaken her and left her to pine for him alone, but to give her up to another man, who had, besides, a prior claim to her faith—why, it was not in Kenneth's nature.

"Then you were a newly-betrothed *fiancée* that first time we met," he said lightly; "no wonder you were carried beyond your right station. And the amiable young man, does he also reside at Ashley Green?"

"You are cruel," cried Etty, with a bitter sob. "It is true I promised to marry Bob, but I don't care for him, I never did. It was only that he worried me so, he would not take no for an answer, and I was so dull and miserable I thought it didn't matter much what became of me."

"And this Mr.—Bob is fond of you?"

"I suppose so," said the girl grudgingly, "he is a doctor's assistant, and we have known him for years and years. My father and aunt say that he is much too good for me."

"And you mean to marry him?"

The violet eyes looked into Etty's as though they would read her very soul. Kenneth waited for her answer, but he knew perfectly that it would not be difficult for him to drive Bob from his place in Etty's life, and fill it himself.

"No," said the girl sadly, "I don't think I can, the more I think of it the more I dread it, but I am not brave, Kenneth, and they will be terribly angry with me at home, I simply dare not tell them."

"Don't tell them then," rejoined Mr. Bertram, "it's a great mistake to tell people disagreeable things, just leave them to find it out."

"But you don't understand," she said testily, "the time is so short. Bob wants to be married in September, and this is the end of June."

"A lot can happen in three months," retorted Ken; "just take my advice and let things drift. Mr. Bob may take the initiative himself and be the one to break off the engagement, which would save you a world of trouble."

"You don't know Bob," she said slowly. "I haven't any particular wish to do so, but I know men in general; you've only got to let him see plainly that you don't care about him, and you hate the idea of the wedding, and I'll warrant he'll set you free."

She lifted her face to his with a strange anxious glance, which, cold blooded man of the world though he was, thrilled him through and through.

"If I were richer, Etty, if I were able to do what I wanted, I believe you would trust me."

"I trust you now," said the girl, simply.

"Aye, but if I were richer, not such an unlucky poverty-stricken beggar, you would trust me with—yourself. If you had promised to marry me in September you wouldn't hate the thought of it, Etty."

"Don't," said the girl, with one last effort at reserve; "you mustn't talk to me like that, Mr. Bertram, it isn't right."

"It is quite right," he continued, "because I love you; I love you, dear, as I never thought it was in my nature to love at all. If only I were rich, instead of being a brideless barister with a millstone of debt round my neck, I'd go to Mr. Stuart this very day and ask him for your little hand."

A long, long silence. Etty Stuart might be worldly and selfish, but she had a soul; it had slumbered long but it was awake now.

She loved Kenneth Bertram with all her heart, all her being; she who had shrunk from the thought of sharing small means with Bob, she whose pulse had never quickened at Bob's devotion, was now so passionately in love that she longed to cry out to Kenneth that debts and difficulties mattered nothing. She would mind no poverty, fear no years of waiting, however many, so only at the end she might belong to him.

"I am tied on all sides," went on Kenneth, "I am a poor man heavily handicapped by debt, and my uncle—the one rich relation I possess in the world—has taken it into his head that I should marry his daughter."

"And you are engaged to her?"

"No I'm not," declared Kenneth, the truth for once suiting him. "I care nothing whatever about her, and she has taken it into her head people should marry only for love, and that she shall never love me. I'm perfectly free, Etty, free as air, only her father has the matter so much at heart that he has begged us both to wait three months and see if we can't fall in with his views. Now, I know Beryl perfectly; she's not the sort of girl to change her mind. She'll make me a curtsy at the end of the three months, and say 'No, thank you,' but all the same I *daren't* engage myself to anyone else before the time's up, lest her father should take offence and withdraw his help."

"You are sure she will refuse you?"

"Certain. If a little girl were not so terribly proud I think the future could be tolerably plain sailing for us both."

"I don't understand."

"Then listen, pet. I love you, but I *daren't* be engaged to you openly until three months have passed. My uncle is an intensely irritable man, and he would take it into his head that he had offered me his daughter and I had refused her. If only you will be sensible, and go home

without telling our secret, all will yet be well. Your engagement to Mr. Dawson can go on till he finds out how much you are averse to it; it will throw your father and sister off the scent, and you and I can meet in secret without any fear of being discovered."

"And then?" asked Etty, gravely, "what next? If Bob doesn't break off the engagement, what am I to do—marry him?"

"Certainly not; you are not to marry anyone but me; there are plenty of ways of putting things off. You can say you are too young, or you have mistaken your own feelings, or you can't be hurried; anything will do so that you let matters drift on till I am able to claim you before the whole world as my dear little bride."

"It would not be fair to Bob," she said, slowly.

"Was it fair of him to win your promise before you had seen anything of the world?" retorted Kenneth.

They were fast nearing London Bridge; the decision must be prompt.

"Which is it to be?" demanded Mr. Bertram. "Will you sacrifice your whole future by entering on a dull, loveless marriage with a man who can never appreciate you at your worth; or will you trust yourself to me and wait?"

"You are sure you do not love your cousin?" the girl asked, feverishly, "and that you would be true to me?"

"Positive. I not only do not love Beryl but I have a very decided objection to her airs and graces. As soon as I can get myself definitely rejected by my cousin, I will come over and explain all to Mr. Stuart; till then I fear we can only meet by stealth."

When those two walked through the barrier at London Bridge Station, the rubicon was passed; for weal or woe, Etty had promised to be faithful to Kenneth Bertram until such time as he could claim her, and to allow her engagement to Mr. Dawson to drift on until the young surgeon himself released her from her promise.

There was a dull sensation of remorse already at the girl's heart; a terrible consciousness that just as she was betraying Bob so her new lover might in time betray her, but she had made up her mind; come weal come woe she would marry Kenneth Bertram, and him only.

There was no one to meet Etty at the station; Kenneth called a cab and packed her and her box into it, though she told him it was a piece of extravagance her family would be shocked at. He held her hand for a moment after she was seated, and then said, quickly,—

"I shall post my letters to you in Barton, then your worthy relations will think they come from one of your late pupils, particularly if I address the envelopes in a large text hand."

"What a good idea!" Poor Etty did not see the double deceit. "And where shall I write to you?"

"At my chambers." And he gave her an address in Norfolk-street. "I am generally there unless I'm at The Firs."

"With your cousin?"

"You need not be jealous," he whispered, tenderly; "believe me, darling, you have no cause."

And then he gave the long-suffering cabman the address at Ashley Green and paid him about treble his proper fare, in consideration of which caddy amiably forgave the delay.

"Oh dear, oh dear!" thought Etty to herself, "how miserable, flat and dull everything in Church-street will seem; and oh, I hope Elizabeth won't expect me to help her teach those pert Cockney little girls."

The said little girls were coming out when Etty's cab drew up; some of them had known her well before she went to Barton, but they did not deign to speak to her or say a word of welcome.

Cabby deposited the box in the hall (the door being open saved him the trouble of knocking), and then drove off, leaving Etty looking at her property with a mute expression of despair, and making not the least step forward into the hall.

Aunt Mary appeared suddenly from the upper regions.

"Oh, it's you, come in child and shut the door;

Elizabeth's busy in the kitchen, you'd better go upstairs and take off your things."

She did not mean to be unkind, but the lack of caress, the want of welcome, gave the girl a blank sense of desolation, and Etty toiled wearily upstairs wishing herself heartily back at Barton.

But she was not left long alone. She had taken off her hat and was arranging her hair when someone came noiselessly up to her, and two clinging arms were thrown round her neck.

"Etty darling, it is so good to have you at home; tea's almost ready, but I thought I would just run upstairs for a minute to see you first."

Etty returned the caress; she was honestly fond of Elizabeth though jealous of the affection the elder members of the family poured out on her; she knew, too, that to Elizabeth she would owe all the little pleasures that might come to break the monotony of her life at 55, Church-street.

"Bob's coming round in the evening," said Betty, brightly; "Aunt Mary asked him to tea, but he couldn't get away in time."

"Whatever made her do that?" asked Etty, in a most discontented tone.

"Why, it's six whole weeks since you saw him," replied Elizabeth, "and you must have lots of things to talk over."

"We haven't," said the young girl, crossly; "and if we had you don't suppose we'd make a spectacle of ourselves before such a spiteful old maid like Aunt Mary!"

Elizabeth sighed, she had a dim misgiving the coming weeks would not be all happiness though brightened by her sister's companionship, aloud she only said, gravely,—

"I am sure Aunt Mary means to be kind."

"Then she has an odd way of showing it," retorted Etty. "By the way, Elizabeth, I saw the drawing-room door open as I came upstairs; surely you have none of you taken to sit there?"

"I meant to tell you," said her sister, apologetically, "but it was so difficult to explain in a letter, I waited till you came home. We have let the drawing-room floor, Etty."

"Taking lodgers!" pouted the younger girl. "Well, I never thought we should fall quite so low as that. Aunt Mary must have protested; she loved her 'gentility' dearly."

"She loved her brother better," said Elizabeth, warmly.

"What in the world do you mean? Surely things weren't so bad that you were compelled to get a lodger?"

"They are pretty bad," said Elizabeth, slowly, "but that wasn't why we did it. Bob thinks father's blindness is not quite hopeless. You know his horror of hospitals, and so Jack and I thought of this plan. We believe if we put the rent by carefully every week we shall have enough to pay a first-rate oculist."

"You are the most romantic pair I ever knew," pouted the other; "the oculist will take your money and tell you the case is hopeless; that's all the comfort you'll get, and for that you put up with the misery of a common vulgar man always about."

"Mr. Underwood is not common or vulgar," protested Elizabeth, "and he isn't always about; in fact he's out so much Jack and I feel as if he didn't get half enough for his money."

"Underwood!" repeated Etty, musingly, "it's not a bad name. How did you pick him up?"

"We put a card in the window and he saw it."

"A card!" Etty tossed her head. "Betty, you have no pride—not a scrap! Aren't we Stuarts! the oldest family in all Ashley Green, and with—father declares—royal blood in our veins, and you just put a card in the window as though we were Browns or Smiths."

"You didn't have to see it," said Betty, coaxingly; "and he pays fifteen shillings a week."

"Some day or other we shan't count money by shillings," said Etty, "I mean to be very rich, Elizabeth, and have heaps of servants and lots of fine clothes. When you see me go to a party in white satin and diamonds you'll laugh at the time when you thought fifteen shillings a week a fortune."

"Well, dear, of course you think Bob will make a name for himself and get on; but really, Etty, very few doctors' wives can dress in white satin and diamonds; don't expect too much or you'll be disappointed if he gets on slowly."

Etty Stuart bit her lip nearly through to keep back the bitter retort that she had not been thinking in the very least of her betrothed lover, Robert Dawson.

The second Miss Stuart had been christened Henrietta, but Aunt Mary decreed that was too long for daily use, and so she was called by turns Etta and Etty, no one having quite made up their minds which diminutive they liked best.

CHAPTER VII.

It was August, for time had gone on since Etty's return to the old house in Ashley Green. Things had not gone at all smoothly with the Stuart family since her return, and Lancelot Underwood, who sat alone in his own den (except the drawing-room) felt a great deal of sympathy for them.

Lance had done his best to modernize the room which had, at first sight, seemed to him so uninviting. A writing-table, a book-case, a few pots of ferns had made a considerable difference to the apartment; and now, with the window flung wide open and an easy chair (also the lodger's private property) wheeled up close to it, Lance really felt tolerably comfortable.

From that open window he could see the whole length of Church-street, besides being able to notice who went out and who came in at No. 55, he could see the grey old church, and even catch a glimpse of the "garden," as local folks called the disused burial ground. It was profoundly quiet, considering how near it was to the greatest city in the world, the noise of tramways and omnibusses could not penetrate to the old world thoroughfare, and though a few of the denizens of Church-street were tolerably well off, cabs were very few and far between; it was as though you left the din and stir of London behind, and had come apart to rest and think.

Lancelot Underwood was thinking, not resting; though the easy chair was comfortable and his attitude indicated repose, he was in truth anxious and puzzled. He had come for the first time in his life to feel there were troubles money was powerless to remedy, and to be honestly genuinely interested in sorrows not his own.

He had been six weeks in Church-street. Very soon he might expect Mr. Benham's reply to the letter describing his first introduction to the Stuarts, meanwhile, he could do nothing; he felt certain things were going miserably wrong with his landlord's family, yet, what could he attempt to help them? He had promised old Geoff not to betray his acquaintance with their cousin without the latter's consent, and a very slight experience of the family had convinced him they would receive nothing from a stranger.

At first, things had seemed tolerably cheerful: the little maid-servant had given Lancelot all the attendance he required. He had heard Elizabeth singing about the house, and had been granted a glimpse of her once a week on the solemn occasion when he paid his bill. Now, all was changed, it was holiday time and the little pupils came no more; but no one sang about the house. Miss Stuart looked taller and gaunter than ever, the blind man's step became feebler and more uncertain. Lance caught not a single glimpse of Elizabeth, and, strangest thing of all, Jack Stuart ceased to go out like clockwork directly after his early breakfast.

What could it all mean! Had the young fellow lost his situation? What fresh trouble hung over the family? He was soon to know. There came a tap at the door, no doubt heralding the cup of tea which Lance always took about eight o'clock. He called out "come in" lazily; but, instead of the small servant, Elizabeth Stuart herself carried the little tray which she set down on the round table while she proceeded to light the gas for Mr. Underwood had been sitting in the twilight.

"Please don't," cried Lance starting up to help

her, "I can do it quite well, Miss Stuart, pray don't trouble. Is Martha enjoying an evening out?"

"Martha has left," said Elizabeth, with the frankness which seems subterfuge.

Lance placed a chair for her near the table.

"Won't you sit down for a few minutes?" he said, gravely, "Miss Stuart, you can't think how lonely I feel to-night. I'm not a garrulous fellow generally, but I do long to hear my own voice."

Elizabeth took the chair with the gentle dignity which seemed so much a part of herself.

"I must not stay long," she said, gently, "and I shall be very dull company. Please take your tea, it is getting cold."

He poured it out, watching her closely the while; yes, he had not been mistaken, some fresh trouble must have fallen on these stepchildren of fortune; why Elizabeth's eyes were red with crying!

"I hope Martha has not committed any very heinous offence," he said cheerfully, "she seemed to me a very well meaning girl."

"Oh, she had done nothing wrong; but we heard of a situation for her, and we let her go at once. We have had a great trouble lately, and my aunt and I think we can manage without a regular servant if we have a woman in in the morning for the rough work."

"I hope Mr. Stuart is not worse?"

"He is much the same in health. This trouble has distressed him very much."

"Won't you tell me what it is?" said Lancelot, "I have had a good many ups and downs myself, Miss Stuart, and I could at least sympathise with you."

She hesitated.

"I think you have seen my brother?"

"Yes, going in and out, and we have met on the stairs. He is very like you, Miss Stuart."

"Yes, Jack and I take after mother. I don't know if I ought to tell you or not, Mr. Underwood; but you are so kind I must, for I do so long for sympathy—Jack has lost his situation."

"That's bad," said Lancelot, kindly, "very bad, but you mustn't fret about it, Miss Stuart; depend upon it a steady fellow like your brother will soon fall into something good, young men like him don't swell the ranks of the unemployed."

"You don't understand," said Elizabeth, putting up one thin hand to screen her crimson face. "Jack has been accused of something he never did, and been sent away in disgrace."

"It's better to suffer for what one hasn't done than to be really guilty," said Lance, "but that thought won't help him to bear the injustice. He was a clerk in some city house I think you said?"

"Yes, in Hunter and Co.'s; the manager, Mr. Bates, was an old friend of ours, he was a pupil here in my grandfather's time, he gave Jack the situation a year ago from kindness, and has always been ready to help him on."

"But what has happened now?" asked Lance, "indeed you may trust me."

"A cheque was missing, an open cheque made payable to bearer, and they say Jack took it."

"Never fear, Miss Stuart," cried the lodger, kindly, "truth always comes out, only be patient and your brother must be cleared."

"But I don't see how," said poor Elizabeth. "The evidence is so clear against him, that even I, who know him, can't wonder at strangers doubting him."

The story was short and sad, but as he listened Lancelot Underwood felt that it was little wonder suspicion had fallen on Jack.

"Mr. Hunter was in his private room writing letters for the afternoon post. His cheque-book was open on his desk. He had just filled in a cheque for five hundred pounds made payable to self or bearer, it was needed for current expenses at his own home, and he intended cashing it on his way from the office. The cheque lay on his desk when his nephew came in with tidings of such importance that Mr. Hunter left the office at once with him, telling Mr. Bates, the manager, as he passed through the clerks' room, to send someone in to stamp his letters and take them to the post, and Mr. Bates sent Jack."

She paused from sheer emotion, and Lancelot, looking at her could see her whole frame tremble before she went on.

"Jack brought the letters into the outer office and carried them to the post. Oh, if only someone else had gone. Mr. Hunter's bank is within a hundred yards of his office, and the cheque for five hundred pounds was presented there at five minutes to four—and paid."

Underwood started up.

"You can't mean that they suspect your brother?"

She bowed her head.

"Mr. Hunter thought no more about the cheque till he was in the train, when he remembered he had left it on his desk, even then he didn't worry, he believed he had crossed it; besides, he had (he declares) full confidence in his clerks; it was only when he came to the office and found it missing that he became alarmed, then he went round to the bank, only to hear it had been cashed."

"But the clerk who paid it would recognise the man to whom he handed the money," objected Lancelot; "your brother has only to be confronted with him to be proved innocent."

Elizabeth sighed.

"Fate seems to be against Jack. It was just before closing time, you see, and there was a crowd in the bank; the clerk says he has no particular recollection of the man who handed in the cheque, except that he was tall and fair; he has seen Jack and declined to swear to him, he says he believes he is the man, but he can't be positive."

"This is terrible," said Lancelot, "it may blight your brother's whole future."

"Yes, Mr. Hunter will not prosecute, he says while he feels convinced of Jack's guilt, he can't bring himself to reduce a respectable family to despair, but, Mr. Underwood, it is almost as bad for Jack as it is. Of course he has been dismissed without a character, no one will employ him, and he is in such terrible despair it almost breaks my heart to see him."

"Your faith in him must comfort him."

"I could as soon doubt myself as Jack," replied Elizabeth, "father and my aunt say just the same, but Etty (that is my sister's name) will keep on asking if the cheque could have got to the bank without hands, and how, if Jack was the only clerk who went into the private room, anyone else can be guilty?"

"I don't wonder at your losing heart," said Lancelot, "but, indeed, you must take courage for Jack's sake. I fear," he added hesitatingly, "this is why you have sent Martha away."

She flushed crimson.

"Yes; you see it may be months before Jack gets into anything, but I hope," again she blushed, "you will not think of leaving us, Mr. Underwood, your comfort shall not suffer. Aunt Mary is very clever at all domestic matters."

"I did not think of leaving," said Lance, making a sudden plunge; "but I find I am likely to be indoors a great deal more than has been the case up to now. When you came in, Miss Stuart, I was thinking of writing to you (I regard you as my landlady, you know) to ask if I could possibly have my meals with you? It is dreary work eating alone. My tastes are very plain, and I would try not to give any extra trouble. I do not know what your Aunt would think proper remuneration; I was going to suggest two guineas."

"I am sure it is a great deal too much," said Elizabeth. "Mr. Underwood, you would get terribly cheated if you had to do with unscrupulous folks."

"But I haven't," he said smiling, "and temporary accommodation always costs more. I know I shall not be here long, for I promised to get back to the colony in the spring. I have been abroad so long that South Africa feels like home to me."

Elizabeth shook her head.

"I have a positive horror of Africa."

"May I ask why?"

"Oh, yes. My father's favourite cousin, who was like a brother to him, emigrated to Africa and was drowned on the voyage out. Of course it was before I was born, but father

has talked so often to me of 'dear old Geoff' that I feel almost as if I knew him."

She rose to go, and Lancelot interposed.

"Will you think of my proposition, Miss Stuart, and," he hesitated, it is so hard to offer help to people of gentle birth, "is there anything I can do to be of use to you? Should I do as a reference for your brother?"

Elizabeth shook her head.

"It is most generous of you to offer; but you see you know nothing of Jack or his capabilities, and of course, wherever he went the question would be at once why did he leave his last situation. I will speak to Aunt Mary about your boarding with us, but I fear we live too plainly to suit you."

She went downstairs to the parlour. Outwardly it was unchanged from the sweet spring evening when Robert Dawson had come there to tell her family of Etty's promise; but it seemed as though a blight had fallen on the human beings gathered there.

The blind man leaned back in his chair, his knitting had dropped from his nerveless hand, and there was a troubled look on his face as though he were searching in his mind for the clue to some difficult problem. Aunt Mary, on the contrary, knitted away with desperate energy as though the bread-and-butter of the family depended on her exertions.

Jack sat a little apart from the others doing nothing, and a look of patient misery on his face.

Etty was making herself a new bonnet; the pieces of lace and ribbon scattered about the table looking out of keeping with that dull formal room, just as the absorbed interest she took in the airy creation was incongruous with the troubled faces of the others.

Elizabeth came in among them like an angel of consolation; she picked up her father's knitting, told her aunt she could not see, and begged Jack to light the gas.

She said no word to Etty, for her sister's distrust of Jack and the cold way in which she stood aloof from them in their trouble had cut Betty to the heart.

Jack obeyed her mechanically; the bright light of the gas showed how pale and careworn he looked, and yet it was a very little time, counting by days and weeks, since the blow fell.

Only a fortnight before he had held himself as proudly as anyone else who boasted an untarnished name.

"Well," said Etty spitefully, "how did you get on as maid of all work? I never thought one of us would come down to waiting on lodgers. I have never set eyes on this grand Mr. Underwood of yours, but he can't be up to much to be content to live here."

"He is a gentleman," said Aunt Mary, stiffly; "and if his face is any guide to his character he would respect Elizabeth just the same in our troubles."

"He seemed as sad as we are," said Elizabeth; "he says he has never been alone so much in his life before, and he is quite longing for the sound of his own voice. I had to explain about Martha's going, and he made me tell him about Jack. I wish you would talk to Mr. Underwood, Jack, he seemed to understand so well."

Jack shook his head.

"I can't speak to strangers now. Why should Mr. Underwood trust me when my own sister believes me to be a thief?"

"I never said so," said Etty, bitterly. "I only said the cheque could not disappear without hands."

"Mr. Underwood wants to know if he can board with us," said Elizabeth; "he is likely to be indoors more now, and he hates eating by himself. I promised to ask you what you thought, Aunt Mary, it might save trouble."

"It wouldn't answer unless he paid well," objected Miss Stuart. "We should have to keep a very different table, and I don't think your father would like a stranger."

"I don't mind," said Mr. Stuart, slowly. "I think, Mary, I am past minding anything now, and—it might make the work easier for you and Betty."

They agreed before supper-time that Mr.

Underwood should be allowed to join their meals. Etta put in a sharp word or two; but Aunt Mary ruled the family and she was in favour of the scheme, and retorted gravely if Etta did not like their arrangements no doubt Mr. Dawson would be pleased to hasten his wedding, and so rid her of the need for putting up with them any longer. To everyone's surprise Etta burst into tears and flounced out of the room.

"I wish Dawson would marry her soon," breathed the blind man, "it would be one less to feel anxious about."

"Bob hasn't been here very much lately," said Jack, slowly, "I hope he doesn't doubt me. It might be his opinion that Etta repeats second-hand."

"No, it isn't," said Elizabeth, gravely. "I saw Bob only to-day, and he was eager in his defence of you; but I don't fancy, poor fellow, he is very happy in his engagement. He told me Etta wanted to postpone the wedding."

A knock at the door announced a visitor. It was one no one expected, Mr. Bates, the managing clerk in Hunter and Co.'s. He shook hands with them all round giving Jack just as hearty a grip as the rest, and then he sat down and seemed to find it difficult to explain his object.

"I wanted to tell you something," he began at last, "it's not much, but it's a faint clue. You know I believe in your son, Mr. Stuart, just as much as I should in one of my own boys, and I've been doing all I could in a quiet way to sift things."

"And have you discovered anything," asked Jack, in a fever of excitement.

"Not much. I know young Callander the clerk who paid the stolen cheque, and I asked him down to dinner yesterday, hoping I should get some information out of him if I had him quietly to myself. He's as grieved as can be about Jack, but he sticks to what he told Mr. Hunter, he can't in the least remember clearly who brought the cheque except that he was tall and fair. He says the bank was crowded, and that the man stood a little distance from the counter, and stretched out the cheque to Callander in his right hand."

"How will you have it?" Callander asked, and he said, "gold," quite short like and that's the only word he spoke. There had been a heavy amount of gold paid in that afternoon, and it was lying on the counter close to Callander's hand. He'd counted it and sorted it into bags just before that. He handed five of the bags to the stranger, and he shot them into a small black brief bag he was carrying, and went out. The whole affair was so quick, and so many other people were passing out of the bank that no one noticed him."

"And the clue!" asked the blind man, slowly.

"Well, it is not much; but it's better than nothing. Callander noticed the man's cuff studs. Stretching his arms out straight, they naturally came very much into view. They were of a most curious pattern, thick dead gold with a tiny key raised on each in black enamel. I never remember to have seen such studs, so I went to a friend I have in the wholesale jewellery line and he told me they were the latest pattern new out this season. Now, I feel pretty certain Jack is not dandy enough to spend three guineas on a pair of links that might be out of fashion in a year."

Jack looked up almost hopefully.

"I never had any gold cuff studs in my life, sir," he said, respectfully. "And all the clerks will tell you that I was not carrying a bag that day. There were not many letters, only six or seven in all and I carried them in my hand."

"And there's not a bag shop between us and the bank," said Mr. Bates, cheerfully. "Jack, my boy, things have looked uncommonly black against you; but I do think I see a rift in the clouds at last."

"And when you are proved innocent you can refuse to go back to Mr. Hunter's," said Aunt Mary, proudly, "for a crueler act of injustice than this charge I never heard of."

"No, aunt," said Jack, "I would go back thankfully to-morrow if Mr. Hunter would take me. He has shown me a good deal of kindness."

Many men would have prosecuted me on the strong suspicion there was."

"I'm afraid it will take a long while," said Mr. Bates, quietly, "these charges are more easily brought than disproved; but to my mind Jack Callander's evidence acquits you thoroughly."

"Could you speak to Mr. Hunter," asked Elizabeth, wistfully; "surely, if you told him what you heard from the bank clerk he would take Jack back."

The manager looked perplexed.

"My dear young lady," he said, gravely, "I'll do my best for Jack, but there's just one point you don't seem to see; whoever owns those cuff studs has access to our office and Mr. Hunter's private room. I don't want to put that individual on his guard; think how easily he could check-mate us. Why, he'd only have to fling away the studs and all clue would be destroyed. No, Miss Elizabeth, I shall not say a word to the chief till I see those studs again, then I shall tell him everything. Callander says he could swear to the studs at any length of time, and I think we must find them."

"Then it was one of the clerks."

"I don't say who it was, Miss Elizabeth; but when I see those studs again, if the wearer is a person who was at our office on that day, I shall have a pretty tidy case against him. Till then I shall not breathe a word for fear of putting him on his guard, if it's as I think I'm afraid there's a good deal of sorrow in store for the chief; but your brother must be cleared at any cost."

Etty had sat perfectly silent all through the interview; now she looked suddenly at Mr. Bates and inquired,—

"Has Mr. Hunter any sons?"

"No children at all but a daughter. Miss Beryl is the very light of his eyes. People do say she will marry her cousin, Mr. Bertram; but there's no regular engagement yet."

When the managing clerk departed it was Elizabeth who let him out, and when he was gone she crept for a moment into the deserted school-room that the mask of cheerfulness she wore for the sake of all the rest might be dropped just for a brief space. She was leaning her head on her hands, the tears streaming down her cheeks, when Jack came in and put one arm round her.

"Betty," said the lad, brokenly, "he is the man!"

"Who?" asked poor Elizabeth, not understanding in the least.

"Kenneth Bertram, Mr. Hunter's nephew. He is in terrible difficulties, as everyone but his uncle knows. It was he who came to the office that afternoon and induced Mr. Hunter to leave his private room in such a hurry he forgot the cheque. Depend upon it, he stayed behind his uncle for a moment long enough to possess himself of that slip of paper."

"Jack this is terrible!"

"And he will marry her," said Jack, breaking down utterly at the thought. "Beryl that beautiful innocent Beryl will become the wife of a common thief!"

(To be continued.)

THE ingenuity of the scientist who established a "clock of flowers," by planting in regular order specimens whose corollas open at specified hours, has been matched by a German who has composed a "clock of birds." This is especially a night clock. The birds and hours of their songs are as follows: The chaffinch from half past one in the morning until two; the titmouse from two to half past two; the quail from half past two to three; the redstart from three to half past three; the cuckoo from half past three to four; the warbler from four to half past four; the marsh-tit from half past four to five; the sparrow at five. It is a curious incident, that the most celebrated of the birds, whose song has always served to mark the hour, is missing in the list. "It is not yet near day—it was the nightingale, and not the lark. . . . It was the lark, the herald of the morn no nightingale."

TWO MARRIAGES.

—101—

CHAPTER I.

MR. GEORGE HARVEY was a rich, miserly old bachelor, the terror and the hope of his humble, but expectant, relations. He had made his money in India, and had returned to his native land with many lace of rupees, a disordered liver, and a ferocious temper.

Despite this latter failing, his former friends swarmed around him, and his two surviving sisters received him with open arms, deaf and blind to all his snubs and bitter speeches, and alluding to him, before his face, as "their dear, eccentric, clever, satirical George."

The ladies lived in the same locality, and had an affectionate struggle with each other as to who should first receive their long-lost wealthy relative.

In this combat Mrs. Vance, the elder, came off the conqueror, and had the pleasure (!) of welcoming her brother to her big red, solid-looking house on the outskirts of Hillford, and of entertaining him, and pandering to his appetite and his whims for the space of a whole month.

At the end of this time he took up his abode in a large mansion at the other end of the town, and established a sour-looking elderly woman as housekeeper, and closed his doors on every one, excepting his lawyer, his doctor, and one or two withered-looking old Anglo-Indians who came to see him occasionally.

Some people said he was eccentric, some people said he was mad. He had lived the life of a recluse for fifteen years at the time at which this story opens, lived in the back of his house, with all the front shutters closed, never visibly crossing the hall doorstep from year's end to year's end, and only taking exercise in his garden.

Mrs. Vance had not seen him for more than two years, and was most anxious about his state of health, and made many secret inquiries from curious sources as to how he looked.

She did not disdain to question the milkman, the sweep, the butcher's boy; she did not dare to question Ann Halliday, the housekeeper, between whom and herself a feud had raged for years.

Ann was a powerful, severe-looking, gaunt woman, whose tongue was a match for any three in the parish, and, according to report, she had got the old gentleman completely under her thumb.

Her brother was gardener, her niece housemaid, and they were as silent as to her doings in the corner house as she was herself.

Her position naturally filled Mrs. Vance with fury; but she was unable to assail it, excepting by indiscriminate abuse to her surrounding circle, and this sort of thing did Mrs. Halliday (as she now chose to be called) very little harm.

To hear Mrs. Vance and her two daughters, Lizzie and Jane, expatiating upon the enormities of Mrs. Halliday and the imbecility of their uncle, was a treat that few of their acquaintances were spared.

We find them this evening taking tea with Mrs. Grey, the other nervous, milder sister, with whom they elected to make common cause at last.

Mrs. Grey was a meek, delicate little woman, who had no self-assertion, and was led by her eldest daughter, Charlotte, in whatever course that black-browed dame chose.

She had one other child, called, by a happy thought, Georgina, after her rich uncle, but who was, as yet, too young to take part in family cavils and counter-intrigues. She sits in a corner rather aloof from the circle, her big, dark blue eyes very wide open, with a gaze of mingled curiosity and alarm, fixed on her aunt, Mrs. Vance, who apparently is the leader in the company, and who is expounding eloquently to her hearer, her spoon in hand.

She (Georgie) is about twelve years old, and already shows promise of considerable good looks; her features are well-formed, her complexion faultless, and her hair, which she wears hanging down her back in one thick plait, is a lovely shade

of golden brown. She is quite unlike her black-eyed elder sister, or her hard featured, sandy-haired cousins; she looks like a goldfinch among a family of sparrows, and is her mother's darling.

"I heard it all from Mattie, the grocer's boy," Mrs. Vance was saying. "Between you and me, I made it worth his while. He was in the hall by chance with a basket of 'empties,' and saw George on the stairs. He says he is greatly failed, and has dwindled away to half his size, and is very bent and feeble; when he saw Mattie he lifted his stick and shouted to him to begone, and swore at him, and he ran, but he got a good look round first. All the windows in the front are shut up, as we see, and the dust simply awful. He says George will allow no dusting to be done, that he was dressed in a kind of loose dressing gown, with a rope round his waist, and his hair was streaming all over his shoulders like a lion's mane, and that he looked just terrible, that is how he expressed it—his very words so fierce and angry; but, evidently"—now drooping her voice—"is not long for this world!"

There was no tinge of regret upon the faces of any of her audience as Mrs. Vance made this announcement in the most impressive manner—quite the reverse. The Misses Vance and Mrs. Grey looked at each other complacently, and then awaited the next sentence with the most profound attention.

"The question is, Maria and you girls," proceeded Mrs. Vance, "what are we to do about his will? If George has a penny he has eighty thousand pounds. I worried that out of Mrs. Bink, the attorney's wife; and think what forty thousands a-piece would do for you and me, Maria," nodding her head at her sister, "you especially, who are a widow in straitened circumstances."

"It would do an immensity, certainly," returned Mrs. Grey, not in a very cheerful tone; "but what is the use of thinking of it, Fanny; it only makes us uneasy and discontented! We shall never see a penny of it—never. You remember he told you frankly that he could not bear the sight of you; he called me a poor, weak-minded idiot to my face. He has no natural affection; he, in short, hates us. He will leave his money to some charity, or—to Ann Halliday."

"If he does I'll go to law with her, that I will," cried Mrs. Vance, fiercely. "I'll declare he was of unsound mind, that he was coerced. I'll wring it from her, as sure as my name is Fanny Vance!"

"Easier said than done, mother," put in her eldest daughter. "Once that wretch closes her kite's claws on it it will be lost to you and your heirs for ever—possession is nine points of the law. The thing is to get hold of him now, before he makes a will."

"Ay," scornfully, "very, fine, indeed; but how is anyone to do that? Who will bell the cat?"

"If we could get Halliday out of the house I would storm him myself," said the young lady, courageously.

"If, indeed! Halliday knows her game too well to stir until she sees George carried out of the house feet foremost. Aye, dear me! dear me!" sighed Mrs. Vance, piously casting up hands and eyes. "It's a shocking and unchristian thing to see a man of George's time of life so set against his own nearest of kin, who never wished him anything but good. He is getting on in years now, too; let's see, Maria, was it sixty-three he was last October? and you know the Indian climate is very trying on a man's constitution. As far as that goes he is really as much broken, by all accounts, as a man of eighty. It would never surprise me if he did not last out the winter!" nodding her head three times.

However, her amiable prophecy was not fulfilled. To her chagrin and surprise Mr. Harvey "lasted" several winters.

Mrs. Halliday still kept watch and ward; and the case had been given up as nearly hopeless by Mrs. Vance and her daughters—who, now that they were getting dangerously near thirty, were more anxious—the latter two ladies—to secure husbands than to give their thoughts and energies

to the problematical chance of figuring in their uncle's will.

Letters, presents, Christmas-cards, all had been rudely returned, and the Vance family had, I may say, given up the corner house as a bad job.

As to Mrs. Grey, she had long relinquished any hopes in that direction, and so had her more sanguine eldest daughter.

Georgie was now nearly sixteen, and no prettier girl walked up and down the old cobble-stoned streets of Hillford.

She was not grown up. Her cousin and elder sister would not allow that she was anything but a child still! Her hair hung down her back in one long plait; her dress was of a juvenile cut. She still went to school, and twice a day she passed the corner house, with its close windows and rusty door-knocker, and had almost forgotten that such a person as the renowned Uncle George was in existence.

It was one afternoon in May, as she was returning from school alone, that the following remarkable adventure befell her.

I should mention that the mother, who was in very delicate health, had gone to London to be under the care of a first-rate doctor. Charlotte had accompanied her; and Georgie and the one servant, Sally, kept house in Ivy Cottage alone.

The corner house had a large back-garden that ran along a good distance of the road by which Georgie went daily to school; and a green side-door opened from it—a door always locked.

On this particular afternoon, as Georgie was returning, satchel in hand, she beheld in front of her a child carrying, with extreme care, a large jug of milk—presumably for the family tea. Alas! for her care. Her eyes were so set upon the brimming jug that she never noticed a big stone right in her way. She tripped and fell; amash went the jug, and the road was liberally watered with the milk.

The child got up, slowly surveyed the catastrophe with a dazed, horrified face; and then, sitting down on the steps of Mr. Harvey's garden door, burst into floods of tears, and sobbed and sobbed in such an utterly heartbroken fashion that Georgie drew near, and stood by in silent sympathy.

"It could not be helped, you know," she said, with a view to consoling the unfortunate. "It was an accident. You won't be scolded?"

"Oh, won't I just!" looking up with a tear-stained, terrified face. "She'll say as I done it on purpose for sure—and she'll beat me!"—fresh bursts of tears and sobs at this unpleasant anticipation.

"Who is she?" demanded Georgie, with increased interest, now putting down her heavy books, and seating herself also on the steps. "Not your mother, is she?"

"Mrs. Evans—at home. She sent me for the milk. It was threepence; and—and—that was the new jug!"—pointing to the shattered remains before her with a trembling tragic finger.

"And did it cost much?" asked Georgie, anxiously.

"Ninapence. Oh, won't she just be angry! I—I dare not go home!"—shivering at the prospect.

"For fear she would beat you?"—in a low voice.

A nod was the only reply.

"Does she often do it?"

"Yes, often since father went away."

"Then she is not your own mother?"

"Nay. My mother's dead. She is father's half-sister," drying her eyes as she spoke on the corner of her pinafore, and making a grand effort to control her long-drawn sobs.

As she raised her thin bare arms Georgie caught sight of a big bruise on one of them that was now passing into the greenish shade, and pointing, asked, hastily,—

"Did she do that?"

A hurried nod was the answer, and an endeavour to conceal the bruise.

"What a horrid woman!" she ejaculated. "Suppose I go home with you—do you think she would let you off? I can tell her I saw how it happened. She would believe me."

"It would be no manner of use," returned the other, hopelessly, "thank you, miss, for once your back was turned she would beat me all the same, though she would be fair spoken enough as long as you were there."

"Then what is to be done?" exclaimed Georgie. "Buy a new jug, if I have the money; but I am afraid I have not enough. Ninepence you said?"

"Yes, miss," in a helpless tone.

"And the milk threepence; that would be a shilling. Let me see!"—producing a shabby little purse and turning it completely inside out, and carefully counting the contents—chiefly coppers. "I have twopence halfpenny," handing it over. "Go and buy another jug and get some more milk, as fast as you can. Perhaps if you tell the dairy people they will make up the extra milk. Now, now, never mind thanking me, but run away, or you will only get into more trouble for being late."

The child, muttering some incoherent expressions of gratitude, needed no second bidding, and in another moment was running down the road with Georgie's little all in her hand, her speed accelerated by the fear of what might await her at home if she was too late for tea.

She left her young benefactress still sitting on the steps, looking after her till she turned an angle and was out of sight; then Georgie rose and slowly turned to pick up her books, which were on the steps behind her.

As she did so it struck her there was something queer about the door. What was it? She paused and looked again.

It was a very funny thing; it was an eye—apparently a human eye—gazing steadily at her from a small round hole more than half way up the door.

It stared at her still in a brazen, unwinking manner. It was a grey eye, and had the advantage of her; for she was before it from head to foot, and, on the part of the eye, it had nothing to offer to her inspection but its little hard, fierce-looking feline.

She stood fascinated for some seconds, probably half a minute, and then some spirit of mischief entered into her—she was nothing but a school girl be it remembered—and she suddenly placed her hand over the aperture in the door, and thus put a speedy end to the orb's investigation.

In a moment she felt the door moving—opening slowly—very slowly—and a hoarse, grating voice from behind it said,—

"Come in—come in."

Very quickly and imperiously, without waiting for a second invitation, Miss Georgie entered boldly, and found herself, very much to her surprise, in her Uncle George's garden.

The green door, as it was closed, revealed to her astonished gaze that old gentleman himself, presumably—not that she had ever seen him before—but he answered to the vivid description that her Aunt Jane had drawn with highly-coloured brush more than once in her presence.

The owner of the spying optic was a tall, thin, bent old man, with fierce bushy eyebrows, a yellow skin resembling parchment, a long, grey beard through which he habitually passed his long, bony fingers. He was dressed in a grey dressing gown, a grey embroidered skull cap, and grey trousers.

"Who are you?" he demanded, gruffly fingering his beard as he spoke. "What's your name—eh?"

"Georgie Grey," she answered, not the least abashed; indeed Georgie was afraid of no one—not even her Aunt Jane.

"Georgie Grey?" he echoed. "Not the daughter of Maria Grey, the widow; not one of that set, I hope?"

"Maria Grey is my mother. I am her youngest daughter," returned the young lady, promptly; "and now," looking him boldly in the face, "I suppose you are my Uncle George?"

"Humph!" ferociously, "I suppose so! Do they often talk of me, and wonder how long I'm going to live, and how much money I'll leave them? Come now, don't be afraid of me; speak the truth for once."

"I always speak the truth, and I am not the

least afraid of you," returned his niece, bravely; "what harm can you do me?" surveying him defiantly.

"No harm, certainly, but I might do you a great deal of good. Well, go on; what do they say?" hammering his stick impatiently on the gravel.

"My mother never speaks of you, and Aunt Jane has not lately. She used to say that she supposed you would leave all your money to some charity, and she thought charity began at home."

"Ha! ha! ha!" interrupted the old man, with a laugh like the bark of a dog. "Not bad, that."

"And she also said—remember you told me to tell the truth, and I suppose people are afraid to tell it to you," continued Georgie, now brave to rashness—"that everyone knew that Halliday had you under her thumb, and that she would take care to be your only legatee, and—"

"What! what! what!" raising his stick in a threatening manner, and stammering with passion, "How dare you, you impudent, boldfaced chit! How dare you!"

"You told me to speak the truth," she answered, stepping back a pace or two beyond the radius of the stick, "and now that I have spoken it, and told you what you asked to know, you would strike me. You are a wicked old man! I don't want to know you. I don't want your money! Open the door and let me go," she exclaimed, indignantly.

"No, no; not yet," returned her uncle, cooling down. "You are not a bad sort of specimen, after all, and you are not responsible for your elders. Georgie is your name, eh? called after me?"

"Yes," fiercely, "I'm sorry to say I am. Are you going to let me out or not?" pointing to the door.

"Yes, yes, namesake; presently, presently. Come and take a walk round my garden, and then you shall go. Come, now, you must not be cross. I saw you give that child the money. You are not a bad girl; not a bad girl. Any other name besides Georgina, eh?" walking beside her down a broad gravel path that intersected his large and beautifully kept garden.

"No," shortly.

"And how old are you, namesake?" grinning and combing his beard with his long fingers as he eyed her narrowly.

"Sixteen in September."

"Not sweet sixteen, eh, namesake? Sour sixteen just now; but not a bad girl—not at all a bad girl. Look here—here comes Moses," he added, as a monster red torn cat came trotting towards them, with his tail erected like a quill pen.

"Moses shall be provided for, oh, yes! And now, sweet sixteen, what would you say if I was to leave you my money? What would you think of that, my dear?"

To this query his niece made no answer. She stalked along in silence, telling herself that her Uncle George was mad—stark, staring mad!

"Would you not be happy if you had heaps of money, eh?"

"I don't know. You don't look very happy with all you have!" she answered, with a shrug.

"Delicious, truth-telling child!" combing his beard, pausing and surveying her ecstatically. "You are a prize; you must come and see me often. You shall come in and dine with me now!" turning towards the house as he spoke, in answer to the faint tingle of a bell.

Georgie was divided between anger and curiosity—curiosity to see the interior of Uncle George's mysterious mansion, and curiosity, after a short struggle, gallantly carried the day; and she, without any great show of reluctance, followed the eccentric old gentleman before her into the house. The front might be shut up to her critical eye, but it was in use.

The dining-room, so early as five o'clock, was lit up, the table laid for one. The plates, appointments, and dishes were all apparently of solid silver, and a magnificent candelabra, with about twenty wax candles, blazed in the middle of the table.

Everything was in keeping with this splendour. Never had countrified Georgie seen anything like

it, and she gazed around in wide-eyed amazement at velvet curtains, Persian carpets, oil paintings, and carved chairs; her uncle accepting her unspoken raptures with twinkling eyes and much clapping of his beard.

"Not what you expected to see, eh? Another plate for this young lady," to a foreign-looking man servant, of whom Georgie had never even heard—a black-eyed, swarthy-looking person, with soft, swift movements, and large gold rings in his ears.

"It's my whim to live like this," said the old gentleman, unfolding a table napkin. "I don't live in Hillford always, either. Halliday is my watch-dog, and keeps the door, but she is not my only servant, as people seem to think. I have Negri—oh, here he comes. Now let me see you eat a good dinner."

"I dined at one o'clock, thank you, and I was just going home to my tea," she replied, frankly.

"Nonsense, nonsense, namesake. Young people can eat at any time," and thus encouraged Miss Georgie managed to dispose of a very respectable repast, and of a large supply of strawberries (forced, of course) and cream, and several delicious little chocolate wafers. Her uncle, she could see, was by no means indifferent to the dainty dishes obsequiously handed to him, and ate deliberately and in silence.

After the meal had come to a conclusion and coffee had been served, her relative abruptly conducted her once more to the garden, and said, as he whiffed at a curious long pipe,—

"You must go, now, namesake. Before you go you must make me a promise."

"Yes," interrogatively, thinking how funny it was to come into daylight once more, and feeling as if the dinner had been an unreality.

"Promise me never to mention that you have been here or seen me. Promise me this faithfully."

"But why?" reluctantly. Of what would her glorious adventure avail her if she might not even speak of it in the bosom of her family?

"Never mind the why," irritably. "You do not leave this without giving me this promise, and I shall know if you keep it."

"Well, then," slowly, "I promise, but I should have liked to tell my mother; may I not tell her?"

"You will tell no one," imperiously. "I do not choose my affairs to be gossiped all over this scandal-mongering town. It is enough for them that they think I am mad; let them! And now for your promise, and look sharp about it."

"Yes, I promise," said Georgie, with visible reluctance.

"That's all right—that is as it should be; and here you may go," opening the gate as he spoke. "We are not likely to meet again—it will be better not, though you are not at all a bad girl—not at all a bad girl. Here," pressing something into the palm of her hand as he bade her farewell, "don't look at that till you get to the end of the road. And now go—be off!" pushing her hastily out of the door, and quickly locking it behind her.

Whatever he had placed in her hand with such mystery felt very small and very flat. What could it be? She would soon know.

She ran to the end of the road at the very top of her speed, and then paused panting, and opened her hand to see what was the wonderful donation Uncle George had so impressively enclosed in her palm.

It was a shilling!

And there is no doubt but that in the present straitened condition of the young lady's finances a sovereign would have been a more acceptable discovery.

CHAPTER II.

Georgie's extraordinary adventure seemed to her like a dream.

She had not been more than an hour in the "Ogre's Castle," as they sometimes designated the corner house, and she could hardly realise the fact at all as she waited past the green door next morning, en route to school, nor believe that she had ever been inside it.

As she had no power to dwell upon and discuss

the visit with another person, and as she was in the midst of preparing for examinations at school, the matter soon passed away into the dimmer recesses of her mind. She had other things to think of.

Indeed, she was soon to leave school, and Hillford, and Uncle George altogether behind her, and enter upon a new scene, for Mrs. Grey had been ordered to live in the South of England if she would live at all, and to abandon Ivy Cottage and the damp prevailing at Hillford before another winter had set in.

Consequently the early autumn found her and her two daughters already established in a neat detached villa on the outskirts of Southsea, living under the wing of a large, imposing house, containing the father, mother, and sisters of Mrs. Bint, the lawyer's wife of Hillford, and the Blaines.

They were very kind and hospitable to the new arrivals, put them in the ways of the place, lent their gardener to "do up" the widow's small domain, and constantly invited the two girls to dinner.

Charlotte alone responded to this, as George was not "out," was too shy, and was averse to leaving her mother.

The Greys and the Blaines, as winter went on, became very intimate, and there were daily goings up and comings down between the two houses.

The intimacy was chiefly between the young people, for Mrs. Blaine and Mrs. Grey had but little in common beyond the delinquencies of their servants, the weather, and wool work.

Captain Blaine was a fierce-looking, reserved veteran, who spent most of his time between his club and his study.

There were two Blaine boys, who were at school, and they, the Greys thought, comprised the whole Blaine family, till one afternoon they were astonished to see Mary and Grace arrive with a good-looking young man in their train, whom they presented as their brother Peter.

"He took us all by surprise," said the elder Miss Blaine, as she seated herself by her hostess and nodded affably at her brother. "He dropped in last night quite unexpectedly from South Africa—the gold-fields."

"We—we never heard of you before," said Charlotte Grey, frankly, so surprised that she could not refrain from this candid remark, gazing at this good-looking, fair young man, with a rather thin, shaven face, aquiline nose, black moustache, and cool, searching grey eyes.

"Very likely not," he answered, raising his eyebrows, and taking in Miss Charlotte with one quick glance of inspection. "I'm not a remarkable character. Have you lived here long?" turning the conversation into a less personal channel, and now making an inventory of the cheaply-furnished room with his calculating gaze.

"Since August last. We are quite newcomers."

"You came from Hillford, did you not, and knew my sister, Mrs. Bint?"

"Oh, yes, we knew her very well; she was one of my greatest friends," hesitantly. "She is coming down here next week."

"Ah, indeed; we shall be quite a family party for Christmas—a most touching sight."

Charlotte did not see the sneer that accompanied this speech, and he added, in a lower tone,—

"Annie is my favourite sister."

Miss Grey was flattered by this confidence, and much impressed by the languid manners and irreproachable clothes, boots, and moustache of this newly-discovered Mr. Blaine, and put forth all her powers of fascination.

Well for her self-esteem that she did not notice the swift signals for departure that Mr. Peter Blaine bestowed more than once on his eldest sister.

In the end these signals were answered, and they rose, all three, to take their leave, Miss Blaine warmly inviting Charlotte Grey to come up in the evening and "have some music."

"Why on earth did you ask her up?" said her brother, as he strolled slowly homewards. "Have we not had enough of her? I thought you were

going to stay there all day. Catch me paying visits with you in a hurry."

"Now, Peter, don't be disagreeable," said Grace, sharply. "When you do come home you should make yourself pleasant, and be civil to our acquaintances. The Greys are great friends of ours. I saw you nearly yawning in Charlotte's face. You have become a regular bore if you can't be civil for ten minutes to a pretty girl."

"A pretty girl! You call her a pretty girl!" scornfully. "I'm sorry for you."

"Well, at any rate, you can't deny that George is pretty."

"What, the young one talking to Mary, that looked as if she was afraid I was going to bite her? I don't admire your bread-and-butter misses," shrugging his shoulders contemptuously; "but it's always the way with you—all your geese are swans! You need not ask the Miss Greys up to entertain me," lounging into their own hall as he spoke.

Of course Charlotte cross-examined her friends about their very presentable grown-up brother, and Mary and Grace were not nearly as open as they were on other topics.

They admitted that he had been "a little wild;" that he and papa did not get on; that he had been lazy at school, and had got into scrapes; but that he was their mother's favourite.

"I may as well tell you at once," said Grace, in a sudden burst of frankness, "that Peter and I don't get on either. Annie is his chum. He is too much of the fine gentleman to suit me; but he can be very nice when he likes," she added, as if by an after-thought.

"He dances divinely, and is awfully popular in society," chimed in Mary. "It's very hard on him that papa would not let him go into the navy as he wanted, but set him up in coffee in Ceylon!"

"Ceylon!" echoed Charlotte, "I thought he came from Africa!"

"So he did, last. Ceylon was his first venture, poor fellow; he has been so unlucky."

She did not choose to enter into all the other ventures into which Mr. Peter had embarked and failed. He did not favour his home with much of his society. Charlotte (who secretly admired him greatly) was bitterly disappointed evening after evening that she spent there, and he never condescended to appear. But after his sister, Mrs. Bint, had paid her annual Christmas visit, a change came over the spirit of his dream. He not only was always "at home" of an evening, but constantly made his way, of his own accord, into Mrs. Grey's little cheap drawing-room.

What did this mean? His sisters, Grace and Mary, were amazed at the hours he spent in making himself agreeable to Mrs. Grey, Charlotte, and, above all, George. He established himself quite as *l'am de la maison*, and never a day passed that he did not find his way down to Moorside Villa. He was filial to Mrs. Grey, devotedly attentive to Charlotte—but his sister, Mary, secretly felt that it was George that was his attraction. But why? and why this sudden wethercock behaviour?

When questioned, he politely told his relatives to "shut up, and mind their own business, and to leave his affairs alone." So they possessed their curiosity with what patience they would, and waited to see what Peter was aiming at; for he never took trouble—and so much trouble, as in the present case—without looking for some remunerative return.

I will let you behind the scenes, and inform you, without delay, that the object Mr. Peter Blaine had in view was a very considerable one—namely, eighty thousand pounds! And how he came to set about attaining it was through the secret information of his favourite sister, Mrs. Bint.

Mr. Bint was Mr. George Harvey's lawyer. He was a weak man, and confided one or two professional secrets to the wife of his bosom. Oh! foolish Mr. Bint. Generally she was most prudent, but in the present instance she did not see, as she said to herself, why she should not turn her knowledge to some account, and do poor Peter a good turn for once. And this is how she

contrived to set the matter before him, as he and she were hurrying home from the pier, one boisterous December afternoon—in the silence common to near relations.

"You say," she said, suddenly, "that papa declares he won't give you house-room for more than another month—that you have no money, nothing but a few suits of clothes and a port-manteau, and those not paid for—that Africa is too hot for you in every sense, that you see no opening anywhere, and that you have no resource!"

"Not one. I see nothing for it but to cut my throat," grimly.

"Peter, how horrid of you!" in a tone of disgust.

"Well, it's a nasty idea, but I'll be obliged to do something of the sort; it will be an easier death than slow starvation."

"Why need you starve! Oh! dear. Oh! dear, Peter, I don't want to lecture you, but what a wasted life yours has been! What good starts you have had—in Ceylon, twice in London, in Liverpool, in New York—and you have got out of everything, and always say it was not your fault. And you always are drowned in debt, as a matter of course. I know mamma squeezes all she can out of the housekeeping money for you, and it's like pouring water through a sieve."

"There," angrily, "that will do. I hate lectures. I'm not looking to you to pay my debts, am I? I never came on you for a shilling, at any rate. You are all very generous with sermons and advice—advice is the only thing you've ever given me, and it's very cheap and nasty."

"I'm going to give you something better than advice," returned his sister, "and it's more than you deserve, I can tell you. I am going to put you in the way of becoming the master of eighty thousand pounds. What do you say to that?"

"Simply the word bosh!" returned her brother with a laugh of the rudest incredulity. "If eighty thousand was going so cheaply you would help yourself first."

"I cannot help myself, or you may be certain that I would," she rejoined with the utmost candour. "Here, don't let us go in yet. Take another turn, and I will tell you all about it. But it is a secret you must promise to keep—remember that."

"I'll remember it sharp enough, especially if it has anything to do with the coin so far away."

"You have heard, perhaps, of old mad George Harvey, Mrs. Grey's brother. He lives at Hillford, shut up in his house, like a bear in his den, from year's end to year's end."

"No, I never heard of him," said Peter, impatiently.

"Well, you shall hear of him now. He is an old, half-crazy, Anglo-Indian, who made heaps of money in Calcutta, and came home about fifteen years ago and settled in Hillford. His two sisters lived there, Mrs. Vance and Mrs. Grey; but he would have nothing to say to them—he would not let them come near him—nor, indeed, anyone but his doctor, James, who is his man of business, and one or two old fogies like himself, with shrivelled up lives and ferocious tempers. He made a will about ten years ago, leaving all his money to charities except a huge legacy to his housekeeper—no mention of any relative in the document from first to last—but a year ago he sent for James again, tore up will number one, and made him draw up another, in which the very comfortable sum of eighty thousand pounds is left to his niece and namesake, Georgina Grey, and at her own absolute disposal."

"Not that girl with the hair down her back and the big eyes?" almost shouted her astounded listener.

"The very identical young lady," impressively. "She does not know of it!"

"No. No one knows of it excepting James and you and I. I am doing very wrong in divulging a professional secret, but your case is, as you say, desperate. You will never—never be able to make a living for yourself. You are nice looking, gentlemanly, agreeable, when you choose, and I strongly recommend you to go in for the heirs."

"I shall if you can promise me that it is a true bill."

"Peter!" in a tone of indignant amazement.

"All right, then, but I can't marry her now, and live on air till the old fellow is gathered to his forefathers. Can I!"

"No, you must manage the rest for yourself. You were always good at scheming. You are sure not to be at a loss," returned Mrs. Bint, emphatically. "I have done my share, and now you must do yours. The first thing, of course, is to make up to the girl, and make her desperately in love with you. That will be easily managed, as she is a countrified, simple, little chit, who has never read a novel, and will believe every word you say, and look upon you as a kind of demigod having got a hold upon her heart. You can do a great deal in a month. You leave the country and come back when her legacy drops in, which it is sure to do shortly. James says the old man is greatly broken, and could not possibly last another six months. And here we are at home," said Mrs. Bint, pausing, "and we must go in, or we shall be late for dinner."

"You are a clever little woman, Annie," said her brother, admiringly, as he gave the bell a loud peal; "and as there is no time to be lost I shall open the trenches at once, and drop down to tea with the heiress to-night."

CHAPTER III.

THE evening after this conversation Mr. Blaine made a very elaborate toilet, and, much to his younger sisters' surprise, volunteered to escort them down to the Villa, as they termed Moor-side.

"I may as well be there as here; anything to kill a couple of hours," he added, languidly.

His arrival in the wake of his relations was an immense surprise to Mrs. Grey's family, and his urbane and agreeable manners astonished them quite agreeably.

He condescended to talk to Mrs. Grey, to admire her prints, to praise the flavour of her tea. He was quite marked in his attentions to Charlotte, and not a few of his crafty glances fell on Miss Georgie, who sat shyly in the background with a kitten on her knee, thinking what a wonderfully clever, handsome, fascinating, person was the Blaine's brother, Peter.

His glib traveller's stories, and his second-hand wit, filled this poor benighted little maiden with mingled awe, admiration, and respect, and her simple face was the mirror of her mind.

After he had taken his departure—squeezing Charlotte's ring into her fingers in his adieu—that young lady was in a very elevated mental condition, and in remarkable spirits.

She took a long look at herself in the glass ere she went to bed, and twisted her head from side to side coquetishly.

Mr. Peter had been attracted at last, and time for him.

She smiled to herself as she remembered one or two of his sweet speeches, and one or two of his stock compliments.

He was very nice-looking—she admired fair men—and his manners were so easy, and yet so reserved.

She dared not cross-question him—as he cross-questioned her—yet. And he was coming again to-morrow. Yes, my good young lady, but not to see you.

You would be a little surprised if you could read that gentleman's thoughts as he sits over his bed-room fire smoking—his mother had timidly suggested the kitchen for this performance; but even when the servants have left the coast clear, he is much too fine a gentleman to patronise the lower regions.

And he gives a good deal of trouble in the house. It is not his good pleasure to rise until the day is warmed, say eleven o'clock; he breakfasts at twelve—his father is not aware of this proceeding, he breakfasts at 8.30 sharp—he lounges out, he lounges in with dirty boots. He calls for whisky and water and glasses of sherry at all hours, he even demands devilled bones after the cook has retired for the night; he swears

freely at the butler or at the dogs; he calls the maids "my dear," and his sisters "you women," and is by no means a favourite with the household.

As he stretches over the fire he seems to be thinking, for he frowns heavily, and mutters to himself,—

"I suppose it's safe, but it's a risky game to play. However, it's a case of Hobson's choice. I have nothing to lose, and I can't well be worse off than I am now, but it's a ticklish business," knocking his pipe on the hob and emptying out the ashes, "a very ticklish business. Still, if I keep my head cool and my tongue between my teeth I may pull through. I think I see my game. As to the girl, she is a mere child; she is the easiest part of it. How she stared at me to-night with her great big eyes when I improvised that thrilling experience of the African lion hunt! I've a clear field, and can make myself the hero of any number of magnificent exploits, and I will, as I see it takes. I'll bet myself a new hat I will turn her round my finger within a week. The 'Othello' business will be my line. She loved him for the dangers he had passed."

"Ah! ah!" the other one thought, "that black-eyed one is a sharp customer, and probably fancies I am smitten with her. She may give some trouble, but I think I'll manage her too. Eighty thousand pounds!" he exclaimed, now commencing to walk up and down his room. "Eighty thousand pounds, no blind nut that; and, of course, James Bint ought to know, as he drew up the will. Annie is not a bad little woman, though she's losing all her looks. There are worse people than Annie," which was a very true remark, and those worse people might be headed by her brother Peter. It really would be hard to find anyone much worse ("did find") than he was. And it was to him that generous Mrs. Bint was anxious to make over simple little Georgie Grey and her very handsome fortune.

Mr. Peter Blaine carefully and quickly carried on his operations.

At first his attentions and his gifts of flowers, papers, books, and boxes of chocolate were general.

Georgie had not the faintest idea of his designs, and, indeed, he had but little chance of noticing her in her sister's company.

He soon saw this, and was quite equal to the occasion.

He discovered it was Georgie's business to do the marketing and the family shopping almost daily, and he hung about Palmerston-road at twelve o'clock on the look-out for her, and not in vain.

The second morning of his watch he met her accidentally, and as accidentally he escorted her home, carrying her parcels, and ingratiating himself with the simple Georgina at every step.

She had long established him as a hero in her own mind. Those feats of his (!) by field and flood had been listened to with greedy ears, and garnered up in the storehouse of a very retentive memory. He was in her opinion a Bayard, *cans peur et sans reproche*; and when this Bayard deigned to notice her, to walk with her, to carry her parcels (a Sally Lunn and a tin of cream) her heart was almost too full. She could not speak for emotion—it did not need—he spoke.

He told her of his lonely life, his unsympathetic home, his longing for some one to love. He did not become personal, he only cashed a large draft on her sympathy, and made a great stride in their intimacy.

Poor child! she little knew the road he was leading her.

He pressed her hand and looked tenderly into her shy grey eyes at parting, and told himself complacently as he strolled homewards, "that he had certainly scored one that morning."

These walks from the shops became of daily occurrence, and were extended. They were not exactly a secret, but, somehow, neither of them, Mr. Peter or Georgie, ever happened to mention these meetings.

This was the first training he gave to the young lady, and she was gradually falling more and more under his influence. His was the master-mind. He was a shrewd, experienced, crafty man of

thirty, who knew the world and its ways by heart, and who believed in nothing but self.

She was a girl of seventeen, with as much knowledge of mankind as a child of seven; believed implicitly in everything she was told; was as transparent as glass, and as unassuming as an infant.

It seemed a wonderful thing to her that this high and superior being could care for her and her society; but he told her that he did—that she was his little wood violet—that it refreshed him to look at her—that he loved her. Yes, he acted his part well.

He did not care really two straws about this unsophisticated big child, with her great wondering eyes, her golden tawny hair, her abrupt manners, and her gauzy figure.

He was merely making love to her eighty thousand pounds! But she, poor innocent, of course, never guessed this, and she not only believed in, but adored Peter.

Peter kept his little love affair very private from his own family, from Charlotte, and from Mrs. Grey, and was most guarded in his manner when he took tea at Moor-side—and why! What was the reason of it?

Georgie had plucked up her spirit to ask why might she not tell her mother and Charlotte, and Grace and Mary, who were so kind to her!

"I'll tell you why, my sweet Georgie. In the first place, I have no money, and your mother would not hear of me as a son-in-law yet; secondly, your sister imagines that I am in love with her—you know better; thirdly, my family hate me because I am unlucky and unfortunate. I never have had the hardness of heart necessary to get on in this world, and to grind money out of other people. No one has ever understood me like you." (Query—did she!) "And you are my sweet little wood violet, and think well of me, don't you, darling? We must wait. I mean to try my fortune in America, and shall come back and claim you some day."

"I don't think mother would mind your being poor," protested innocent Georgie, as they paced Blaine's garden in the twilight; "so let me tell her. It seems wrong to have a secret from mother."

"Very well," said Peter, pausing and standing before her on the pathway in the lane. "If you think you know the world so much better than I do take your own way. You will see that she will inquire into ways and means; she will ask to see my father. He knows I have not a penny yet; she will forbid me her house"—poor Mrs. Grey who had not the courage of a mouse!—"and there will be end of everything. You must choose between her and me," he added, resolved to crush down these scruples, once for all, with a firm hand, and to begin as he meant to go on.

"Oh, Peter!" sobbed his victim, "you know I could not bear to give you up! You are so good, so brave—so—so unselfish" (so he said); "I will leave it all to you; you are far the wisest—you know best."

And then Peter smoothed her hair, and told her not to cry and be a silly child, and to leave everything to him, and it would be all right; and Georgie believed him, and was so completely fascinated—so absolutely dazzled by this good-looking, wily, fair-headed Peter—that she suffered herself to be engaged to him without the knowledge of a soul besides themselves.

Their stolen meetings were so sweet, their public meetings were pleasant, when they each took up their role of mere pleasant acquaintances, and now and then managed to exchange a word, or tried "better luck across the crowd." In her case she was most sincerely in earnest, poor infatuated maiden. Her heart throbbed with all the emotions and palpitations of first love—secret first love; whilst he, the wretch, was merely acting a well-worn part, and often felt very weary of the whole performance. She was so silly, he told himself; so credulous—so childish. There was hardly any amusement in playing the role of lover. If she had been older, and more experienced, she would have been worthy of his steel.

CHAPTER IV.

MATTERS had been in this state for nearly a month; and Peter, despite of his father, remained at home far beyond the allotted period; but the old gentleman was not to be befooled. He did not intend to allow his able-bodied son to live on him any longer, and a stormy interview one evening after dinner culminated in a fortnight's notice to quit.

The next morning found Peter at the villa, interviewing Georgie in the garden alone.

In a voice trembling with feigned emotion he gave her a very exaggerated description of the scene, and told her that his unnatural parent had turned him out-of-doors; that he was going to America, when she would soon forget him, and marry someone else. In short, he worked upon her feelings very successfully, and reduced her to a state of the most abject woe; and then he told her to dry her eyes, put on her hat, and walk with him into the town of Portsmouth, and he would tell her what he proposed doing *en route*.

Charlotte was out. Mrs. Grey had no objection to Georgie going for a walk with Mr. Blaine; and soon the couple started, and they had not proceeded far when Mr. Peter discussed his scheme.

"You say you will be constant to me, Georgie! Words are cheap. I prefer deeds. How can I tell what may happen before I have even landed in New York! Women are all fickle. Perhaps in six months' time you will be married to another fellow, and cutting me in the street!"

"Oh, Peter! how can you!" she protested, with quivering lips.

"Then will you prove your love by a test, Georgie?"

"Yes, gladly. Need you ask?"

"Then marry me before I sail!"

Georgie suddenly stopped on the pavement, and looked at her companion with parted lips and incredulous eyes.

"You need not be alarmed. I don't want you to rough it in the States; it will just be a mere matter of form, just to bind you to me, and no one else—just to ease my mind. I sail this day fortnight. The day I sail, if you consent, we will be married at the registry office, and you will be secretly my wife! And I shall have secured the eighty thousand pounds," thought Peter to himself. "It cannot escape me then."

The suggestion was a shock to Georgie; but her clever companion soon talked her out of all her scruples; and within half-an-hour she found herself inside a registry-office at Portsmouth, standing shyly in the background; whilst Peter, the persuasive, gave formal notice for the marriage of Peter Blaine and Georgina Grey that day fortnight.

The announcement was actually affixed to a board outside the door in the public street; but her *fancie* reassured Georgie that no one they knew would be likely to come that way. They were quite safe, and on no account was she to tell her mother. This was the text of his conversation nearly the whole way home; and Georgie, who was as much under his influence as if he had mesmerised her, agreed to his wishes.

That night he wrote to Mrs. Bint, and told her of the step he had taken, and requested the loan of fifty pounds, to be repaid with interest out of the legacy.

Mrs. Bint responded with only half that sum, and with a long epistle full of warnings, cautions, and advice and a certain amount of sisterly approval of his proceedings thus far.

Charlotte Grey heard of the approaching departure of the fascinating Peter with grief and dismay (but what was her grief in comparison to Georgie's!) She was amazed and disappointed that he had not spoken, and positively hoped against hope up to the very last minute, which shows how well and how artfully Mr. Blaine had played his cards.

She never for a moment suspected that he had paid any attention to her sister, save such as he would bestow upon a child, and she looked upon Georgie as nothing more.

The day of departure came, and in the morning, Georgie making some vague excuse, left home immediately after breakfast, ostensibly for Southsea and shopping, in reality for Portsmouth and marriage.

Peter met her at a certain rendezvous, and together they walked to the office; and there, with the door wide open, and with two passers by as witnesses, brought in casually for the occasion, they were made man and wife! A ring was placed on Georgie's finger, and she returned home no longer Miss Grey, but Mrs. Blaine.

She could not believe it, when she had hidden her ring (in her purse) and taken leave of her husband at the garden-gate. She felt that what had happened was hardly a reality as she entered their own modest domicile, and was imperiously called to by her sister to "come at once—where on earth had she been all the morning!—and help her to wash up the drawing-room ornaments." It was the day of a general cleaning and dusting of that apartment.

She found Charlotte in the china pantry in a very big apron, and not in the very best of tempers, washing and drying the precious Indian, old Chelsea, and crown Derby china.

"Here, take off your hat and gloves," she said, sharply, "and dry these things! What have you been doing! How could you stay out so long when you knew this was the day we turn out the drawing-room!"

Georgie removed her hat and jacket, and muttered something incoherent, but intended as an apology, as she began to take her share of her sister's occupation with assumed alacrity.

"Did you see Peter Blaine?" asked Lottie, abruptly, as she rinsed out an old punch bowl.

"Did you meet him this morning?"

Georgie merely nodded her head.

"He did not say anything about coming down, did he?"

Again a shake of the head.

"But of course he will—he will come to say good-bye. I know he goes by the mail this evening. What an old wretch Captain Blaine is to treat his only son in such a way! What a hard-hearted, wicked old man!—as bad as your Uncle George. There is one thing I want to ask you, Georgie. You must have remarked—and you are not nearly so young and silly as you look—how very attentive Peter has been to me. He has even been civil to you because you are my sister. I have seen it myself. Now, when he comes to say good-bye to-night do you efface yourself as soon as possible, and leave Peter and me to make our adieu alone. I know he has something to say to me—something particular. Do you understand! I can tell you that I am frightfully cut up at his going away."

Miss Grey was so absorbed in her own woes and her own anticipations that she never noticed her companion's quivering lips and shaking hands.

Strange that this worthless Peter should ever make such a favourable impression on the fair sex, whilst they shunned and scorned better but plainer men!

Crash on the stone flag went a lovely crown jug that had slipped almost like a living thing from Georgie's shaking, nerveless hands.

And the sister's torrent of bitter reproach was the only thing that saved her from betraying herself and bursting out crying at the very idea of Peter's departure.

Peter came down, and, thanks to her manoeuvres, had a *à la tête* interview with Charlotte; but although she wore her most becoming evening dress, and was tender and tearful, he never spoke one significant or hopeful word.

Georgie bade him good-bye (a company good-bye) before her mother and sister, and one of another fashion later on, when she rushed out into the garden in the dark, and there bade him a real and most heartrending farewell.

She wept and sobbed and clung to him like the silly young creature of seventeen that she was, and as if she were parting with the very light of her life.

Once this emotional scene was over and he had torn himself away, murmuring promises of constant—constant letters, he felt a great sense of relief. That part of the play was over, thank goodness, and citing the role of Romeo was a

severe strain upon this wolf in sheep's clothing, who did not care one single fig if he never saw Juliet again! All he wanted was her money; but poor Juliet did not know this, and went about her ordinary avocations in a heartbroken fashion, ascribing her red eyes and dull spirits to a bad cold.

She was always first down; her mother breakfasted in bed, and her sister was not an early bird, so she had the privilege of opening the letter box and taking out the letters.

How her heart leaped when she first saw one directed to her in Peter's handwriting! How she gloated over her treasure—how she lived on it for days! Not that it was either very tender, or very loving, but her warm, youthful imagination supplied all deficiencies.

She, on her part, wrote sheets, and sheets, and sheets, which he barely glanced over, and then consigned to the flames. Indeed, latterly he scarcely took the trouble to read them through as they came. He would not be bothered with this girl's foolish maundering all about him and her, and love, and constancy, and her mother's health, &c. If there had been a line about her Uncle George that would have been another affair.

His own effusions were short, and not very frequent. How Georgie looked for them!—how she counted the days from mail to mail, the hours once that mail was in! How she trembled when she heard the postman knock, and snatched the letters ere he had barely reached the door! Often she was disappointed, and she could not speak to relieve her mind; and this disappointment, and the burden of her secret, lay like lead upon her spirits.

Charlotte had found another admirer, and had forgotten Peter. Mary Blaine was going to be married. It was not unlikely that there would be a wedding from the villa too; and at the end of the year succeeding Mr. Blaine's departure there was a double event as predicted.

Mary married an elderly naval doctor, and Charlotte became the bride of an Australian sheep-farmer who had come home to see the old country and look for a wife, and found one to suit him in Miss Charlotte Grey.

Then Georgie was left alone, to look after her mother, who had become more and more of an invalid.

She caught a cold at her daughter's wedding, and the result was that she was confined to her bed for the whole of the winter.

This was dreary work for Georgie. Her only visitor was Grace, who often came down to enliven her, and bring her books and flowers, and insisted on her going out and taking her place in the sick-room occasionally. She noticed that her friend was in desperately low spirits, and vainly tried to rouse her; she also noted that she made constant but circuitous inquiries for her brother Peter. Why was this? She hinted her surprise one evening, as they were sitting together over the dining-room fire, in the twilight, alone.

"You are always so interested in Peter, you funny girl; and yet you and he were never such great friends. If it was anyone it was Charlotte; but Peter cares for no one but himself. He has amused himself with dozens of love affairs, but soon tired of them. He has no heart."

"Oh! don't say that, Grace!" said her friend, shading her eyes with her hand: "I know you are wrong; it is not true."

"Nonsense, my dear!" taking up the poker and giving the coals an upheaving, "how can you tell half as well as his own sister, who is well acquainted with his character? I hope you have not been so silly as to believe any of the sweet speeches he may have made you!"

"Oh, Grace!" returned her companion, now sliding suddenly off her chair and burying her face in that young lady's lap. "I must—must tell you something; I cannot keep it to myself any longer. It will kill me, this secret; and I have not heard from him for a whole year."

"What is your secret, you silly girl!" she said. "I'm sure I hope you have not been so foolish as to fall in love with Peter, and consented to be engaged to him!"

(To be continued.)

MARGOT'S NATURAL ENEMY.

—10—

(Continued from page 609.)

"It will soon be over now," she said, without the suspicion of fear or regret in her voice. "I have felt it all along, and this morning I have received a confirmation of my presentiment. It is better so, oh! so much better, because it makes everything clear for us. The way is no longer difficult to tread, and the light shines brightly at the end of the journey. Margot, darling, little Margot, for my sake try not to sob so piteously, talking exhausts me, and I want you not only to hear but understand all that I say."

With a great effort the young girl suppressed all outward sign of emotion, and Decima went on,—

"You know that I am dying, that even if I wished it, I could not stay longer with you; but I have lost all desire of life—Margot dear, I stole your lover from you, now I give him back again."

"Oh Decima! Decima! You break my heart! Live if only for his sake, live to teach him love's best lesson! I thought I had hidden my secret well, I never meant you to guess—sister!—sister!"

"Hush, my dear; I guessed it on the night you saved Edward's life; I was sure of it on my wedding eve, for I heard you at the gate, and not until then did I realise how great a sacrifice you had made for me, or how vast was the love you had given me. I prayed then for guidance and help—and my prayer was granted, though not in a way I dreamed of. Little sister! little sister! for all the joy that was, for all the joy that is to be, I thank and bless you!"

"You are dying for me," cried Margot, "it should be I, not you, lying here; I never, never can forgive myself."

"Come closer, aron; I am glad to go—Edward give me your hand, ah! dear I have loved you well, but I never could have been to you all that Margot is and will be. She can share your dreams, your hopes, your labours—and so—take her back from me—the best gift my hand can bestow—and when you are happy together think of me, if you can think of me without pain, without regret. Now, take her hand, and promise that in due time Margot shall fill the place I am leaving empty—wear the name I should have been proud to wear."

"Decima, as Heaven is my witness, you never should have had reason to regret giving yourself to me; even now there may be hope."

"I have done with hope," she answered gently, meeting his wet eyes with compassionate gaze, "all is for the best, I would not have it otherwise if I could. Now—promise—and oh! you who love each other so dearly, hearken to me—let neither time nor trouble, have power to chill your love—let no chance put your wedded hearts asunder." With those words she drew Margot's hand gently across the coverlet.

A moment Edward hesitated—then he said in a choked voice,—

"Margot! for her sake!" and bursting into tears she allowed him to take her slender fingers in his clasp.

With a satisfied sigh Decima said,—

"It is well; but because I have loved you so dearly Edward, let yours be the last lips to kiss me goodbye when I am starting on my journey."

For three days she lingered, sinking painlessly; on the eve of the third her pure, sweet soul escaped to its native Heaven, and the hearts of those who loved her were heavy with woe.

Dion's wretched allies were brought to justice, and now through his set teeth Edward vowed to use the utmost rigour of the law against them, for though Margot was first in his love, Decima had been very dear, and he would avenge her death to the utmost.

Dion's name was mentioned in such a very unpleasant fashion that he deemed it expedient to fly the country; this with the aid of his friends he succeeded in doing, and was drowned on his way to South America.

At Castle Patrick there is a fair young wife, who makes glad the lives of her lord and her father, and in whose heart dwells always the tender memory of a face long gone, and a love that was stronger than death.

From her windows she can see the white cross which marks Decima's resting-place, and the first toddling steps her little son takes are to the sacred spot, where all that is earthly of "auntie" waits for the last great call.

[THE END.]

FACETIÆ.

CLERK: "Are you going to discharge me, then?" Druggist: "Yes, I think we can dispense without you."

HARROGATE. Fashionable Invalid: "I came here for hay-fever, you know." Irascible Bachelor: "Well, you've got it, haven't you?"

COURT: "Why should the prisoner have an interpreter? Can't he speak English?" Attorney: "No, your honour; he's a railway porter."

MAGISTRATE: "What passed between yourself and the complainant?" O'Brien: "I think, sir, a half-a-dozen bricks and a piece of pavin' stone."

BINKS: "The doctor advises short, quick runs several times a day, but he says the exercise will do me no good unless it has an object." JINKS: "Buy a straw hat."

COMPANY PROMOTER (to his solicitor): "What would you do about those charges?" Solicitor: "Well, considering the evidence, I think this is a case for scornful silence."

HOSTESS: "Oh, thank you for your lovely music, Herr Blumentoff! It's just what I like. It blends so perfectly with the conversation without in the least interrupting it!"

MISTRESS: "Here is a letter for you returned through the dead letter office, Bridget." Bridget: "Och, wirra! wirra! It must be me poor ould mother, thin—the saints rist her soul!" (Faints.)

AT BRICHFON. Dumble: "What's a good thing for sea-sickness, Wimble?" Wimble: "Such a lemon just before it comes on, and another one after it's all over. That's the best cure I've ever seen for sea-sickness."

CLOCKTICK: "If you would only learn to take care of money I might decide to leave you something." Gallagher: "Why, uncle, I'm only getting myself in shape to fully appreciate your generosity."

"I wish, Mrs. Browne," said the star boarder to his landlady, "I wish you'd give me the receipt for that pudding we had yesterday." "I'd much rather give you a receipt for the board you had last month," returned the landlady.

PAINTING INSTRUCTOR: "Ze young lady puts ze paint on too thick." Mrs. Newrich: "Oh, never mind that, professor. Her father's got enough money to buy barrels of it if she wants it."

"A MAN who'll maliciously set fire to a shed," said Mr. Slow, as he paused in reading his newspaper, "and burn up twenty cows, ought to be kicked to death by a donkey—and I'd like to do it myself!" (Slow is very severe sometimes.)

IN FRANCE. Railway Official: "M'sieu, your valet has been run over and cut into a dozen pieces." Languid Englishman: "Haw! Be good enough, please, to bring the piece that—haw! contains the key of my hat-box—haw!"

IN COURT. Judge: "How came it that when you broke into the shop you carried off a lot of useless trash and left the till untouched?" Prisoner: "Oh, me lud, don't you begin to scold me for that, I beg. I have heard enough about that already from my wife."

LADY (to Chinese servant): "John, is it true that you Chinese servants have a trade union?" John: "Yessie." "Suppose I should discharge you without paying?" "We boycott you." "But suppose, instead of a Chinaman, I should get a girl?" "Chinese union payee policeman to notice dierce."

BRIDE (who had eloped): "Here is a telegram from papa." Bridegroom (anxiously): "What does he say?" "All is forgiven, but don't come back."

"That's too bad! My wife has gone and sent my handkerchief to the wash, and I'm positive that I tied a knot in it to remind me of something!"

JUDGE: "We are now going to read you a list of your former convictions." Prisoner: "In that case perhaps your worship will allow me to sit down."

A SMART bit of repartee was overheard the other day at Killarney. A guide with a tourist accosted at a peasant who stared well at him. "You'll know me again if you meet me," said the guide. "Not if you wash yer face," said the peasant.

A MOUNTAIN old lady happened to be in a Christian Endeavour meeting. She was much impressed by the young people's earnestness, and especially pleased with the singing. She said, "Oh, I do love to hear 'em sing! They sing with such venom."

HE: "How do you like the new servant?" She:—"First rate. She seems very neat and clean. Here she comes." "But, my dear, that is not the same girl who was here yesterday morning." "You're right, John, but you asked about the 'new' servant, and there she is."

PRETTY GIRL (mountain resort): "I want a yachting cap." Dealer: "We do not keep them. There is not a sheet of water big enough to sail in within two hundred miles of this place." Pretty Girl: "Oh, you mistake. I did not ask for a yacht. I said yachting cap."

A LOCAL BAND was one day playing at Dunderline, when an old weaver came up and asked the bandmaster what that was they were playing. "That is the 'Death of Nelson,'" solemnly replied the bandmaster. "Ay, man," remarked the weaver, "ye hae gien him an awfu' death."

SHE: "And did father give his consent all right?" He: "Well, not exactly; when I asked him for your hand I told him that I was ready to put my best foot foremost, and—" "What did he say?" "He said that he was also prepared to do the same—er—and he did."

LADY (to little boy): "What are you crying for, my little man?" Little Boy: "My fa-father has been beatin' me." Lady: "Well, don't cry. All fathers have to beat their boys at times." Little Boy: "But my fa-father isn't like other fa-fathers. He's in a brass band and be-beats the big drum."

Tenderly she stroked his throbbing brow. "Tell me, my husband," she urged, "what is the matter?" He turned his pleading eyes toward her. "The servant girl," he faltered, "has broken my heart." Rising abruptly she paced the room with quick, nervous tread. "That dreadful creature," she muttered, "won't leave any whole bric-a-brac in the house."

MRS. KASH: "How prettily our new servant speaks!" Mr. K.: "I hadn't noticed it." Mrs. K.: "She must be an educated person. She invariably says 'tatooes,' and 'sparrow-grass,' instead of 'taters' and 'sparrerg-rass,' like the illiterate servants we have had in the house before. Nothing pleases me like proper pronunciation."

A VERY "fresh" young man lately made the acquaintance of a young lady, to whom he proceeded to pour out a long story of some adventure in which he had played the hero. His listener was much surprised. "Did you really do that?" she asked. "I done it," answered the proud young man; and he began forthwith upon another long narrative, more startling than the first. The woman again expressed her polite surprise. "Yes," said the fellow, with an inflation of the chest; "that's what I done." A third story followed, with another "I done it," and then the Boston girl remarked: "Do you know, you remind me so strongly of Banquo's ghost!" "You mean the ghost in Shakespeare's play?" "Yes." "And why?" "Why, don't you remember what Macbeth said to him, 'Thou canst not say I did it!'" The young man could not imagine why everybody laughed.

SOCIETY.

THE Duke and Duchess of Teck are going to Sandringham about the third week in October, on a long visit to the Duke and Duchess of York at York Cottage.

THE second accouchement of the Crown Princess of Roumania is expected in November, and the Duchess of Coburg will be with her daughter when the event takes place.

It is thought that the fortune left by the Comte de Paris will amount to something like two millions of money, and the Duc d'Orleans is expected to inherit almost immediately an income of about £10,000 a year.

THE Princess Christian has consented to open a bazaar, to be held in the Highbury Athenaeum in November next, in aid of the fund to provide a vicarage for the parish of St. Thomas's, Finsbury Park.

THE Princess of Wales is to go to Copenhagen to attend the wedding of her niece, Princess Louise of Denmark, and Prince Frederik of Schaumburg-Lippe, which will probably take place about the end of January.

It is probable that the Empress Frederik will come to England for a fortnight or three weeks just before her departure for Italy, to visit the Queen at Windsor Castle and the Prince and Princess of Wales at Sandringham.

If all goes well the Czarevitch is soon going to Germany, and will be the guest of the Duke and Duchess of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha at Coburg, and of the Grand Duke and Grand Duchess of Hesse-Darmstadt at Darmstadt. His Imperial Highness has also promised to visit Denmark.

THE seventy-seventh birthday of Queen Louise of Denmark was signalled by the formal announcement of the betrothal of her Majesty's granddaughter, Princess Louise, daughter of the Crown Prince and Princess to Prince Frederik of Schaumburg-Lippe.

THE Queen will probably visit Wiesbaden in April next, for the purpose of taking a course of waters and massage. In which case Her Majesty is to occupy the Royal Palace during her stay. The Queen has not undergone any regular course of treatment for the rheumatism in the knees, from which she frequently suffers, since her last visit to Aix-les-Bains in the spring of 1891.

THE Castle Museum at Norwich is to be formally opened by the Duke and Duchess of York on Tuesday, the 23rd inst. The Duke and Duchess, who will then be residing at Sandringham, are to arrive at Norwich at one o'clock by special train from Wolferton; and the programme of the afternoon will include the function at the Museum, a luncheon, a visit to the Cathedral, and tea at the Palace, after which T.R.H. are to return to Sandringham.

THE Prince of Furstenberg, who entertained the Prince of Wales at Baden-Baden, is coming to England for the October meetings at Newmarket, and in November he is to be a guest at Sandringham. The Prince will probably race in England on a large scale in the course of a year or two. The Prince of Furstenberg, who is one of the richest of the German mediatized princes, is married to a daughter of the Duc de Talleyrand-Perigord. He has immense estates, with valuable mines and collieries, and vast forests. The principal family seat is the Schloss of Donaueschingen, in the Black Forest, in the grounds of which residence is a spring which is the source of the Danube.

PRINCESS BEATRICE's stall at the Crathie Bazaar was equipped the best of all. Gifts arrived from all parts of the world. The Duchess of Coburg sent a large contribution; the Duchess of Connaught, sewed work; the Princess of Wales, carved wood work; Princess Maud of Wales, beaten copper work; and the Duchess of York sent her favourite poker work; while the latest photos of Prince Edward of York sold like wildfire. Prince Henry of Battenberg dabbled in photography, and his studio was just as complete as his wife's retiring-room. He did a good trade in photographing the fair ones for the moderate sum of five shillings each.

STATISTICS.

NINETY SEVEN out of every hundred Arctic explorers have returned alive.

THE average of sunshine observed at Greenwich for fourteen years is only three hours a day.

THE statistics show that the city having the greatest death rate in the world is Rheims, France, the proportion being 28.62 per 1,000 in each year. Dublin follows with 27.05 and then New York with 26.27.

STATISTICS show that all occupations that expose the person to dust predispose to tuberculosis, and that persons who follow sedentary occupations are likewise predisposed to the disease. Those who live outdoors are almost entirely free from it. Contagion, especially due to floating germs, seems to explain these facts sufficiently.

GEMS.

WHAT is taken from the fortune also may haply be so much lifted from the soul.

It is by attempting to reach the top at a single leap that so much misery is produced in the world.

WHEN a strong brain is weighed against a true heart it seems like balancing a bubble against a wedge of pure gold.

EVERY generous illusion of youth leaves a wrinkle as it departs. Experience is the successive disenchanting of the things of life; it is reason enriched with the heart's spoils.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

HOME MADE GINGER BEER.—Pour a gallon of boiling water upon one pound of lump sugar, and one ounce of bruised ginger, one ounce of cream of tartar and a sliced lemon; let it stand till nearly cold, then add two spoonfuls of yeast, and the white of an egg. Let it stand three hours, then bottle off. It should be well corked; it really ought to be tied down. Pint champagne bottles will do.

FROSTED PEACHES.—Frosted peaches make a pretty dish, and are easily prepared. Take twelve nice-looking peaches, and with a coarse cloth rub off the fuzz; then roll them in powdered sugar, and set them up carefully in a sheet of white paper on a waiter, and put in the sun. When they are half dry, roll again in the sugar, and expose them again to the sun and breeze until the sugar is quite hard, and then put in the refrigerator until ready to serve.

TOFFEE.—Two pounds yellow sugar, quarter of a pound butter, a little ground ginger or lemon, half teaspoon cream of tartar. Put the sugar, the cream of tartar, and the flavouring in a nice pot, with one breakfast cup of water, boil about ten minutes, then add the butter; do not stir it at all, let it boil a little longer; then have a spoon in cold water, dip it in the toffee, and into the cold water again; if it gets hard on the spoon it is ready; pour on a buttered dish till it is hard.

A TASTY SALAD.—Slice a cold boiled or baked beetroot, arrange it in slices overlapping each other, pour over a mixture made with cream, a very little vinegar, pepper and salt; garnish the dish with horseradish and hard boiled eggs, whites and yolks separate. Wash two heads of lettuce, dry them thoroughly, tear (not cut) them into pieces, put them into the salad bowl. Take some sprigs of tarragon and chervil, one or two small chives and a little bit of parsley. Mince them fine and mix them with the lettuce, and sprinkle with a tablespoonful of salt and some pepper. Pour a salad dressing over all.

MISCELLANEOUS.

SOAP was taxed £28 per ton in the time of Queen Anne.

DURING the tenth century no woman was allowed to appear at church without a veil.

JAVANESE brides, during the marriage ceremony, wash the feet of the bridegroom.

THE nutmeg tree, when cultivated, grows at least fifty feet high, and bears fruit for sixty years.

THE Ainu women in Japan tattoo their faces to give them the appearance of men with whiskers.

A SPANISH musician has devised a system of musical notation by which the sharp and flat system is done away with.

A MOLE's home in the earth has always four or five outlets. By means of one or the other the inmate is generally able to elude any danger.

THERE is a species of terrapin at the Zoological Gardens which is in the fortunate position of not having to work for a living. Like the children in the fairy tale, it has simply to open its mouth and food will drop in. In the mouth of this reptile is a little tag of flesh, which is in continual vibration, and nearly always visible, for the creature remains open-mouthed for hours together. It is believed that the sight of this is particularly alluring to the piscine mind; the fish commits the very pardonable though fatal error of mistaking it for a wriggling worm, and in trying to take the bait is caught in the trap and swallowed.

SUNSHINE is the very best cure in the world for those microbes that scientists have frightened most people so badly about. For, according to some experiments made by two distinguished Germans not long since, microbes multiply in the darkness at such a rate it seems miraculous. In a drop of water the bacilli, which numbered eight or ten in the early evening, had increased to some thirty in a drop before morning. These German scientists spent an entire night by the Isar, dipping out water at intervals to make these observations. Every hour they dipped out fresh water. In the morning the bacilli began to disappear again.

THE oldest known specimen of the rosebush in the world is at Hildersheim, Hanover. It was planted more than one thousand years ago by Charlemagne in commemoration of a visit made to him by the ambassador of the Caliph Haroun al Raschid. In the year 818 a coffin-shaped vault was built around its sacred roots, and a few years later a cathedral was built near by, so close, indeed, that the vines were trained along the stone walls. In the year 1146 the cathedral was destroyed by fire, but the vine survived and still flourishes. At present it is twenty-six feet high and covers three hundred square feet of the cathedral wall. The main stem, however, after over one thousand years' growth, is only two inches in diameter, but is said to be as hard as ivory.

SOME remarkable cases of natural grafting have been observed lately in America. One is that of a sugar maple which has coalesced with a white pine in a woodland of Wisconsin. The trunks keep apart for three and a half feet above the ground, where they unite into a single stem. It is supposed that friction in the wind or the nibbling of a deer has frayed the green bark when the trees were saplings, and caused them to adhere. Other cases of white pines growing together have been reported, in one of them as many as four trunks uniting at a sufficient height above the ground to allow persons to walk under. A veritable "bow-knot" formed by the branches of a tree has also been described; and in the heart of two trunks—one of burr oak, the other of white wood, sawn up for lumber—the antlers of deer were found imbedded. It is supposed that the animals had caught the tips of their horns in the green wood and broken them off. In the heart of another trunk of hickory wood a horse-shoe was found; but how it got there is quite a mystery.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

M. Q.—Presumed Marohbanks.
PERKINS.—She should have a prefix.
STEVE.—Liverpool is wholly in Lancashire.
FRANKIE.—Bets are not recoverable in court.
INQUIRER.—The wall at the back of the altar.
C. T. C.—He is as eligible as any other person.
REASNER.—Either of the soaps you mention is good.
WHITTED ONE.—Sorry to say the annoyance is inevitable.
FRANCK.—What is already "fermented" will not mature.
SPORTING TOM.—We have no record of the race you mention.
ROTHIE.—Lettuce and onions eaten just before retiring cause sleep.
EVANGELINE.—The nationality of the child follows that of the parents.
A MINOR.—A person under age cannot be made liable for debt.
CONSTANT READER.—Fruit cools the blood, cleans the teeth, and aids digestion.
LESLIE QUERRY.—If your sister leaves a child, you would not be her heir.
E. C.—They have no particular signification except the wedding ring.
EDITH.—"Betsy and I are out" is in Carleton's "Farm Ballads."
BEAT.—If you are injured by the refusal, you can sue him for damages.
AUSTIN.—What you require can be purchased at any of the large toy-shops.
V. G. W.—The pneumatic tyre is now universally admitted to be far superior.
ONE WHO WANTS TO KNOW.—We do not know whether it is rare, or what is the selling value of it.
D. G.—It would be against our rule to recommend any particular office.
CATWIP.—Artichokes and tomatoes go well together with a vinegar dressing.
T. T.—Mr. Gladstone became Premier for the first time on December 9, 1868.
VERENA.—The name "Eyre," in the book "Jane Eyre," is pronounced "air."
HUTLEY.—Not unless the agreement expressly saddles him with the responsibility.
DONCAS.—Chrysanthemums live longer than any other flower after being out.
HIRAN.—Imprisonment for contempt of court by non-payment does not cancel the debt.
OUTRIBUT.—We are not aware of any means whereby tattoo marks can be removed from the arm.
WILFORD.—Each article of foreign manufacture should be marked with the place of its origin.
KEWELL.—We do not think the music is obtainable; songs go out of fashion and out of existence.
EWAK.—We don't know any system which may be learnt in shorter time than the one you name.
OSLER.—You can regulate the spices according to taste, of course. Peel, core and cut up the apples.
HOUSEWIFE.—To know when cake is done listen to hear if it "talks." Cake is silent when done.
K. D.—It is said to be the case; the wind blows the tops of the trees to windward over the flames.
FRANK.—Submit the painting to a dealer, or an experienced connoisseur in such things.
H. D.—Blondin appeared first in London at the Crystal Palace on a bicycle on the low rope.
O. B.—A man may use a gun in his own ground, for mowing birds or killing vermin, without a license.
ROMERICH.—Apply to the managing director or secretary of one of the large steamship companies.
ALBERT.—Several translations were published. You might pick up a copy at some second-hand bookstall.
HEWEL.—It would seem from the reading of your letter that there should be no trouble in getting a pension.
ONE WHO WANTS ADVICE.—The employment of a solicitor is not compulsory, but we strongly advise you to go to the expense.
ONE IN DISTRESS.—You cannot be compelled to live with your parents if you are able to maintain yourself elsewhere.
ADAM.—We suggest that you communicate with an animal and bird dealer as to the value of the cat in your possession.
FAIRLESS HAIL.—The only reliable "recipe" for strong whiskers and moustaches is the razor; if that does not bring them nothing will.
ALF'S GIRL.—1. It is purely a matter for yourself to decide. We do not think it is necessary to do so. 2. We do not see how the article you mention can be dyed without injuring it. 3. You write a very neat hand.

R. B. S.—An apprentice cannot be obliged, after the expiration of the term of the indentures, to make up time lost through illness.

DORA.—Bedding should be aired every day; every piece removed and given as much individual air and sunshine as is possible.

A. E.—Christmas Day in 1846 came on Friday; in 1859 on Sunday; in 1872 on Wednesday; and in 1877 on Tuesday.

FOOLISH ONE.—A person might live on a diet exclusively of milk, but would not be likely to grow very fat or to be very strong.

SWEET SMOKE.—Smoking in reason, say three pipes per day, will not injure the voice; but on no account smoke cigars or cigarettes.

HARSHED.—If you are a weekly tenant you can claim no more than a week's notice; without any compensation for disturbance.

A. S.—Lime-water is what its name indicates—lime dissolved in water. Your druggist will furnish it already prepared.

A. M.—The difficulty in your way is that qualified men are so plentiful and cheap at present it does not pay an owner to engage one like you.

CHRISTOPHER.—It is necessary for an author to furnish his name and address when he sends a story to a paper. An anonymous story might be a copied one.

PUZZLED.—The term means music which is universally accepted as the best of its kind, and the appreciation of which does not depend on a mere passing taste.

THE LILY AND THE POET.

A Lily on the highroad lay,
 Beneath the fierce and scorching ray
 Of midday summer sun.
 It chanced a Poet, passing by,
 Upon the Lily cast his eye;
 His sympathy it won.

"Poor little flower," he plying said,
 "Who left thee thus with drooping head
 Beneath a burning sky?
 Ah, me! It was a thoughtless deed
 To cast thee forth, like common weed,
 To wither and to die."

"Away from cool and grateful shade
 Of garden bed or mossy glade,
 Where, erstwhile, thou didst bloom.
 My heart with pity bleeds for thee,
 Thus treated so despitely,
 And left to such a doom."

"The Lily is the spotless flower,
 The emblem of the priceless dower
 Of purity of heart;
 King Solomon, in all his power,
 Was not arrayed like thee, sweet flower,
 Thou work of Nature's art."

"I cannot leave thee in thy need,
 Amidst the dust to rot and bleed,
 I cannot leave thee so.
 Close by there lies a lovely mere,
 Whose sparkling waters, bright and clear,
 O'er waterlilies flow."

"Upon its cool, refreshing breast
 I'll lay thee gently down to rest,
 And banish all thy pain.
 The water spirits will change thy shape,
 And, as a 'Lily of the Lake,'
 Thou yet shalt bloom again." C. M. A.

OLD READER.—"Don Quixote" was written by a Spaniard named Cervantes. The book is very interesting, and many persons have read it again and again.

S. C.—People wink because the eye must be kept clean and moist, and by the action of the eyelids the fluid secreted by the glands of the eyes is spread equally over the surface of the globe.

AMBITION YOUTH.—The way to get employment as a reporter or correspondent is to apply for it, and be ready to show what you can do, in case you should get an opportunity to do so.

ANGRY ONE.—As you permitted the doctor's visits by failing to tell him he would not be required again, you are supposed to have invited him to call, and are liable in full payment of the account sent.

N. E.—The term infectious is applied to diseases which can be conveyed by the atmosphere; contagion to cases in which there must be some contact of a healthy person with a diseased one.

BERNARD.—The letters "R.F.Q.R.," inscribed on the standards of the Roman legions, are the initials of the words "Senatus populusque Romanus"—"The senate and the people of Rome."

L. M. P.—Melissa was a beneficent fairy. The name was invented by the Italians, but passing into French and English literature as a poetical title, has finally become a recognised Christian name.

FIVE YEARS' READER.—Camphor may be beaten in a mortar for some time without being reduced to powder, but if it be first broken with the pestle, and then sprinkled with a few drops of spirit of wine, it may be readily pulverised.

Y. R.—The Bedouins are a tribe of Arabs whose wanderings are not confined to Arabia, but extend over Egypt, Syria, and Asia Minor. The headquarters are in the region round about Mecca.

IGNORANT.—Conservatism means the disposition and tendency to preserve what is established; opposition to change; the habit of mind, or conduct, of a Conservative, who is opposed to radical or revolutionary measures.

RUFUS.—In case of separation of husband and wife the care of a young child, say up to four or five years, should remain with the mother, unless it can be shown to the satisfaction of the court that she is unfit to have the custody of it.

D. L.—To write merely for practice, may be good as an amusement, but it is not good in a business sense. Whatever is worth publishing is worth paying for, and all good publications are willing to pay for what they get.

DOUBTFUL DAUGHTER.—Legally, the control of a father over his children extends to the age of twenty-one; but if a son or daughter of eighteen, able and willing to work independently, chooses to leave home, we do not know that the father can do anything to prevent it.

O. F. D.—To detect cotton in linen, unravel a piece of the fabric, boil, warp and twist, and plunge it into a solution of aniline and fuchsine. This will dye the whole red. Take it out, wash it, and while moist dip it into ammonia; the cotton threads will lose their colour, while the linen will remain red.

LOVELL.—Sir Edward Bulwer Lytton and Lord Lytton were one and the same person. He began his distinguished literary career as Mr. E. Lytton Bulwer; then he was made a baronet; then he acquired an estate, and took the surname of Lytton, and finally was made a peer, under the title of Lord Lytton.

WATERPROOF.—Our impression is nothing can be done to restore the colour to the cloak you speak of; but as we have not seen it, and therefore do not know to which quality or variety of cloak, going under the same name, it belongs, we cannot speak definitely, but only advise you to take it to a waterproofer.

ADMIRING READER.—1 lb. bay salt, 1 lb. saltpetre bruised with a little common salt, 8d. of cloves pounded, 1d. of storax, 1 nutmeg grated, 2 or 3 bay leaves, rose leaves gathered and added without drying to the above mixture; lavender flowers may be used as well; a much smaller quantity than this can be tried, and it does for a great many rose leaves.

TRIST.—Owing to the extreme delicacy of the fabric it is almost impossible to rid velvet of a stain without defacing it, but as milk is the staining material it is the fat or butter that is lying on the surface, and by pressing the steam of a kettle through the velvet from behind and wiping the face of the cloth with a bit of plush, a large part, if not the whole, of the stain may be lifted.

GLADYS.—As for the marriage of persons who are supposed to be of similar temperaments, that is a matter that requires but little attention. Young persons fall in love and marry regardless of temperament. The important part of marriage is to live harmoniously, and this is a thing independent of complexion, colour of hair or eyes.

MCCARTHY.—Private betting or wagering between two persons is not illegal; what the act forbids is systematic or professional betting either in the open or in premises hired or used exclusively for the purpose of making and taking bets; as far as regards the private wager, the only way in which law discommends it is to refuse to give the winner access for the money if the loser should have to sue for it.

SOMERSET.—If you have been badly sunburned apply to the burned parts a thick coating of white vaseline, which will remain for ten minutes or more; then rub it off by applying a soft dry cloth gently; have a bowl of very hot water brought to you and a big linen towel. Dip the towel in the water, which must be hot enough to steam, and almost bury your face in it, but do not touch the skin with it for some time; you should steam your face this way for fifteen minutes, and by that time every drop of blood in your body will seem to be in your face. Then call for more hot water and apply it in soft, gentle fashion to the skin for fifteen minutes. Then put on a coating of vaseline and lie down for a half an hour; when you get up you will be as fresh as a daisy and your face will not trouble you in the least. Of course the length of time for treatment will depend upon how badly you are burned.

THE LONDON READER, Post-free. Three-halfpence Weekly; or Quarterly, One Shilling and Eightpence.

ALL BACK NUMBERS, PARTS and VOLUMES are in print, and may be had of all Booksellers.

NOTION.—Part 207, Now Ready, price Sixpence, post-free, Eightpence. Also Vol. LXII, bound in cloth, 4s. 6d.

THE INDEX to Vol. LXII is Now Ready; Price One Penny, post-free, Three-halfpence.

IF ALL LETTERS TO BE ANSWERED TO THE EDITOR OF THE LONDON READER, 234, Strand, W.C.

†† We cannot undertake to return rejected manuscripts.

London: Published for the Proprietor, at 234, Strand, by G. F. CROFTON; and printed by WOODFALL and KIDDER, 75 to 78, Long Acre, W.C.

DR. J. COLLIS BROWNE'S CHLORODYNE.

THE ORIGINAL AND ONLY GENUINE.

CHLORODYNE is admitted by the Profession to be the most wonderful and valuable remedy ever discovered.
 CHLORODYNE is the best remedy known for COUGHS, CONSUMPTION, BRONCHITIS, ASTHMA.
 CHLORODYNE effectually checks and arrests those too often fatal diseases—DIPHTHERIA, FEVER, CROUP, AGUE.
 CHLORODYNE acts like a charm in Diarrhoea, and is the only specific in CHOLERA and DYSENTERY.
 CHLORODYNE effectually cuts short all attacks of EPILEPSY, HYSTERIA, PALPITATION, and SPASMS.
 CHLORODYNE is the only palliative in NEURALGIA, RHEUMATISM, GOUT, CANCER, TOOTHACHE, MENINGITIS, &c.



It is admitted by the Profession to be the most wonderful and valuable remedy ever discovered.

CAUTION—BEWARE OF PIRACY AND IMITATION.

Sold in Bottles at 1s. 1½d., 2s. 9d., and 4s. 6d. None Genuine without the words "Dr. J. COLLIS BROWNE'S CHLORODYNE," on the Government Stamp. Overwhelming Medical Testimony accompanies each Bottle. **SOLE MANUFACTURER—**

J. T. DAVENPORT, 33, Gt. Russell St., Bloomsbury, London.

HOLLOWAY'S PILLS AND OINTMENT.

THE BEST MEDICINES FOR FAMILY USE.

THE PILLS

Purify the Blood, correct all Disorders of the internal organs
 And are Invaluable in all Complaints incidental to Females.

THE OINTMENT

the most reliable Remedy for Chest and Throat Affections, Gout, Rheumatism, Stiff Joints, Old Wounds, Sores, Ulcers, and all Skin Diseases.

Manufactured only at 78, New Oxford Street, London,
 And sold by all Medicine Vendors throughout the World.

N.B.—Advice gratis, at the above address, daily, between the hours of 11 and 4, or by letter.



Exquisite Models. Perfect Fit. Guaranteed Wear.

THE Y & N PATENT DIAGONAL SEAM CORSETS,

PATENTED IN ENGLAND AND ON THE CONTINENT.

Will not split in the Seams, nor tear in the Fabric.

Made in White, Black, and all the Fashionable Colours and Shades in Italian Cloth, Satin, and Coutil; also in the New Sanitary Woolen Cloth, 4s. 11d., 5s. 11d., 6s. 11d., 7s. 11d. per pair and upwards.

"Admirably modelled—exquisitely neat and strong."
 —Queen.

THREE GOLD MEDALS

Sold by the principal Drapers and Ladies Outfitters in the United Kingdom and Colonies.

RISING SUN STOVE POLISH.

EASIEST, QUICKEST, CHEAPEST, & BEST BLACKLEAD IN THE WORLD.

N.B.—In Half the Time and with Half the Labour you can produce more polish with Two Penny Packets of the "Rising Sun" than with Half-a-dozen Penny Packets of ordinary Blacklead.

RISING SUN LIQUID METAL POLISH

Bottles 6d., 1s., and 2s. 6d.

Gives to Metal Articles of every Description (Gold, Silver, Copper, Brass, Steel, &c., also Glass), a Beautiful Soft Brilliant Polish, which lasts Six Times as Long Without Tarnishing as other kinds.

MACK'S DOUBLE STARCH.

Contains the Very Best Starch Borax, Gum, Wax, &c., as well as the STARCH GLOSS. Saves Time, Labour, and Uncertainty, as in it are combined, in their PROPER PROPORTIONS, all ingredients necessary to produce BEAUTIFUL WHITE GLOSSY LINEN. Requires no addition and no preparation.

CHANCELLOR'S PLATE POWDER,

EASIEST, QUICKEST, CHEAPEST, AND BEST.

In 3d. Boxes.

Samples of the above Four articles post free for 8 stamps, or of any One for 2 stamps (to cover postage). Ask your Grocer to get them for you.

C. CHANCELLOR & CO., LONDON, E.C.

100 ASTONISHING VALUE!!!
 100 Packets of Genuine Flower Seeds 1s., post-free 1s. 2d.
 Cash returned if not satisfactory.
DANIEL STONE, LOUDWATER, BUCKS.



Quickly correct all irregularities, remove all obstructions, and relieve the distressing symptoms so prevalent with the sex.
 Boxes 1s. 1½d. & 2s. 9d. (the latter contains three times the quantity of all Chemists. Sent anywhere on receipt of 15 or 34 stamps by the maker, E. T. TOWLE, Chemist, Nottingham.)
 Beware of imitations injurious & worthless!



NORTON'S CAMOMILE PILLS are **CONFIDENTLY RECOMMENDED** as a **SIMPLE** but **CERTAIN REMEDY** to all who suffer from Indigestion, Sick Headache, Bilious and Liver Complaints, Heartburn, and Acidity of the Stomach, Depressed Spirits, Disturbed Sleep, Loss of Appetite, Dyspepsia, Spasms, General Debility, Costiveness, &c. They act as a powerful tonic and gentle aperient; are mild in their operation, safe under any circumstances, and thousands of persons can now bear testimony to the benefits to be derived from their use. Ladies will find them invaluable during pregnancy. Those who suffer from irregularity should never be without them.

Sold in Bottles at 1s. 1½d., 2s. 9d., and 11s. each, in every Town in the Kingdom.



WORTH A GUINEA A BOX.

BEECHAM'S PILLS.

FOR ALL

Bilious and Nervous Disorders, such as
Sick Headache, Constipation,
Weak Stomach, Impaired Digestion,
Disordered Liver, and
Female Ailments.



Contains Fifty-Six Pills.

THE SALE IS NOW SIX MILLION BOXES PER ANNUM.

Prepared only by the Proprietor, **THOMAS BEECHAM**, St. Helen's, Lancashire.

Sold by all Druggists and Patent Medicine Dealers everywhere, in Boxes, 9½d., 1s. 1½d. and 2s. 9d. each.
 Full directions with each Box.

BEECHAM'S TOOTH PASTE

Will recommend itself; it is Efficacious, Economical, Cleanses the Teeth, Removes Tartar, Prevents Decay, and is a Pleasant and Reliable Dentifrice.

In Collapsible Tubes.—Of all Druggists, or from the Proprietor for One Shilling, Postage Paid.

SULPHOLINE

Bottles
Sold
Everywhere.

The Cure for Skin Diseases, Eruptions,
 Blotches, Eczema, Acne, Disfigure-
 ments. Makes the Skin Clear, Smooth,
 Supple, Healthy.

LOTION

PEPPER'S

2s. 6d.
SOLD EVERYWHERE.

QUININE AND IRON

TONIC

GREAT BODILY STRENGTH!
 GREAT NERVE STRENGTH!
 GREAT MENTAL STRENGTH!
 GREAT DIGESTIVE STRENGTH!
 Promotes Appetite, Cures Dyspepsia,
 Hysteria, Nervous Complaints, &c.

BORWICK'S

BAKING THE BEST
POWDER. THAT MONEY
 CAN
 BUY.

PURE AND FREE FROM ALUM.

GRATEFUL—COMFORTING.

EPPS'S

(BREAKFAST)

COCOA

BOILING WATER OR MILK.

Reckitt's Blue.

WARNING

Refuse all Substitutes!

5

d

3

7

1.